

A SUBURBAN CHURCH FACES CHANGE

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Presented to
the Faculty of
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Doctor of Ministry

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
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ABSTRACT

This paper is the anatomy of one specific objective in adult Christian education in the congregation of Edmonds Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Edmonds, Washington, the goal from which it was derived and the educational project structured to fulfill it. I attempt here to affirm, illustrate and clarify the value of an understanding of denominational heritage to a local congregation, especially in the face of the unsettled nature of theology in our time.

My conviction is that the experience of the Edmonds congregation in this regard is not unique. The effects of rapid change are felt throughout the Church, and especially in mainstream Protestantism. I trace changes in theology and the relationship of theology to education that bear upon the problem of identity and solidarity within a congregation.

The story is placed in its broader setting, giving a picture of the changing theological scene in which a congregation must identify itself. The review of the theological revolution of recent decades helps explain why a congregation may be found in a state of crisis. This background also provides the beginning of a rationale for a congregation reviewing its heritage in order to re-define itself and renew its life.

Finding an understanding of heritage as vital both for the theological and the educational tasks of a church,

I then examine the role heritage plays in telling us who we are and in placing the matter of change in perspective. I show by biblical study and an examination of personal and corporate experience that heritage is a vital factor in attaining an adequate sense of identity.

Out of this background I present a lecture series on Disciple heritage which was offered by knowledgeable Disciple leaders, representing both clergy and laity, and a critique of the series, indicating ways in which the project could have been strengthened.

Responses to the lecture series and the results in terms of a sharpened sense of identity in the congregation support the view that the review of heritage was more than a mere exercise in nostalgia. While a body of highly technical statistical data was not derived from the evaluation process, responses to a questionnaire, as well as observations concerning changes in the congregation's life, support the affirmation of the value and validity of the review of heritage. The lecture method of presentation is also supported by authorities in Christian education and by the church's experience of the project as well.

I conclude that we cannot force a theological synthesis for our time that offers certitude and finality for a congregation. What can be found, however, in a review of heritage, are certain abiding values in our tradition which provide an adequate sense of identity and value and

meaningful work to do. A clear and adequate grasp of heritage, held in openness, is a stabilizing and health-giving influence for a congregation in a time of change.

INTRODUCTION

What prompts a congregation to review its denominational heritage?

Well, when life bogs down for an individual, he or she may begin to ask questions like: "Just who am I anyhow?", "How did I get this way?", "What is the purpose of my existence?", and "On what basis do I decide what is in character for me and what is the responsible use of all I am and have received?"

When a marriage bogs down the parties may retrace their steps, remember their early beginnings, look at what has changed since their first taste of loving and examine the forces that have forged their new situation.

When a denomination bogs down, thoughtful leaders may view the situation not only with alarm and pain, but with insight, and point out to its people what has occurred.

Ronald E. Osborn is one who did that sort of thing for Disciples. He examined¹ the condition of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), especially as it applies to evangelism. He touched briefly on the early portion of our heritage prior to the Great Depression when the Disciples

¹Ronald E. Osborn, "Evangelism, Its Past, Present and Future Among Disciples," Impact Disciples of Christ on the Pacific Slope, no. 2 (1979), pp. 3-4.

"grew in dramatic fashion" causing some observers to believe the Disciple religious movement would "take the country" and calling the first century of Disciple history "the Pentecost of the nineteenth century."

Then, pointing to the past forty years as a period of decelerating growth and then decline among Disciples, along with other denominations in the mainstream of Protestantism, he noted the era of change that broke in upon us. And while he did not lay blame for all the ills of the church on this, it is clear that he understood the role of change in frustrating the sense of identity and mission in our time. He wrote:

Our world changed all about us. People moved from the country and small town to metropolis. A new view of the Bible undercut the simple proof-texting to which we too often resorted for easy success. The ecumenical movement made the plea for union commonplace rather than distinctive. Neo-Orthodoxy bestowed prestige on a brand of theology which left Disciples with an inferiority complex. Then followed an era of theological confusion. Meanwhile Oriental cults, fundamentalism, and the charismatic movement seized popular attention. We Disciples stirred uneasily, retaining the mindset which led Clarence Lemmon to dub these the "weird religions," but not learning how to address the folk whom they attracted. When not on a spiritual high, people old and young adopted a brashly secular lifestyle; reflected constantly in the media, it left those of us committed to the Christian way feeling outnumbered. What a securities analyst said of a large grocery chain in trouble could apply to us: "It would have been easier for A & P if the world had stood still."²

At Edmonds Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
we understand from experience something of what Osborn is

²Ibid.

writing about. We felt life bogging down and began to ask questions. The winds of change have blown across the landscape and rearranged the dream upon which our church was founded: the dream of a rapidly growing, unified congregation that would fill four acres with a completed master plan and parking lot as it reached to the community and received the flood of families building homes in the suburbs. For the new congregation, founded at the end of the 1950s, became involved in the turmoil of the 1960s. Two traumatic experiences of polarization and fragmentation, spaced a few years apart over cultural and theological issues such as the place of immersion in church membership, the role of neo-fundamentalism and the charismatic movement, the proper form of Christian worship, and the role of women, divided and devastated the congregation.

As a result, the shadow of death appeared to fall, for a time, across our congregation. Some marks on the shadow were as follows:

(1) A number of Disciple members of long standing felt disillusioned and threatened by a change in the temper and mood within congregational life and the appearance of an effort on the part of an element in the congregation to dominate its life with a new theology, form of worship and style of life. Some were hurt and confused by the inference of others that their Christian experience and commitment were inferior because they were not involved with

glossolalia, faith healing, and the like. There was anger over instances of teachers setting aside Disciple church school curriculum and initiating a style and quality of education out of phase with Disciple faith and tradition. Several families with deep attachment to their Disciple roots began to feel that the church had changed so radically that they might feel the necessity to search for another church in order to maintain their own integrity. These families were the backbone of leadership and financial support for the church. Their departure from the church's life could have signaled its demise as a viable institution, at least as a self-supporting church solidly in the Disciple tradition. Perhaps the clearest register of the precarious nature of the situation is that a congregational vote on a motion to call in the regional minister of the Northwest Regional Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to counsel the church in its polarized condition prevailed by only one vote.

(2) Disgruntled members who were angry because many would not fall in line with their inclination that the church should embrace the charismatic movement and change the style of theology, education, worship and polity to reflect this shift, seemed to be calling for the church to change or close.

(3) Growth had stopped because those who stood in confusion between the two groups described above were not

inclined, any more than any others, to promote the church lest the friends and neighbors invited get caught in the crossfire and be permanent casualties, in respect to church membership.

(4) Disciple families moving to the area and visiting the church tended to be turned off by the atmosphere they found.

(5) A lack of trust marked the life of the group.

So the flow of energy in the life of the church stopped for a time. Ultimately, a number of charismatic families were sifted out of the church. Exhaustion and numbness were felt.

Following these experiences an interim minister fresh out of an eastern seminary served the congregation for a year of "cooling off." Some small group work and the sharing of skills in group dynamics and communication benefited the congregation.

At the beginning of my ministry here, people in the congregation were still "walking on eggs" and refraining from sharing thoughts and feelings important to them for fear of precipitating another time of conflict and turmoil in the church.

After a get-acquainted period and a series of small group experiences in which communication and openness were invited, the congregation adopted a management-by-objectives

approach to coming to grips with its life, program and future.

A "Dreamers Group" representing the congregation met a number of times to evaluate the program of the church and to project goals toward which to work. Twenty goals were written and prioritized. Out of this experience the church's main project was first to deal with the gut-level feelings and issues that tended to divide the congregation. A professionally led Encounter Group experience with follow-up changed the atmosphere in the congregation in a positive way. A second round of prioritizing later surfaced goals in the field of education as highest concern. On a scale of zero to five, 38 persons, representing 28 units at that time, gave the highest priority score--4.1--to the following goal statement: Help all adults in the church grow in terms of broadening their horizons, to a deeper understanding of the heritage of their biblical faith.

The church cabinet, comprised of executive officers, committee chairpersons and task force leaders, divided into two working groups to hammer this goal into an objective. Two emerged. They were:

- (1) To offer a series of lectures to our people on our denominational heritage as a biblical people.
- (2) To offer a buffet of Bible study experiences to increase the number of adults in Bible study.

The project under discussion in this paper has to do with only the first of these. Behind the project there are some implicit questions. Among them are:

(1) Can adult education deal with the self-understanding of a congregation?

(2) Can the history, heritage and faith of a denomination be reviewed in a meaningful way that will help persons in their decision about their identification with the church?

(3) Can a shaky sense of denominational identity and theological direction be stabilized to any appreciable degree by such a review?

(4) Is the lecture method an effective and appropriate method to use for such an educational enterprise?

We have proceeded on the assumption that an affirmative answer can properly be made to all of these questions. I believe our experience with the project and its aftermath supports that view.

It is important for the reader to understand that the project, and this report, was limited in scope. I have not intended to leave the impression, in quoting Osborn's remarks earlier, that I have dealt with all the issues touched on there. While the elements of fundamentalism and the charismatic movement were involved in the upheaval in our church, the educational project was in no way a face-off with these expressions of Christian faith,

theology and life. Neither does the project deal with the need of Disciples to be able to address persons who are attracted to these religious expressions in any direct way. What we do concern ourselves with is the importance of understanding our denominational heritage and the point or points of view that characterize our religious movement. There is an implicit confidence here that clarity contributes to confidence and that confidence does contribute in a positive way to the effectiveness of communication.

What we were concerned with in the project and also discuss here in this paper is an effort to deal authentically with the impact of change upon us as a Disciple congregation. As I reflect on the project carefully there are four more specific questions I raise for consideration. They are:

(1) What are some of the important dimensions of change in the fields of theology and religious education, related to the change, mentioned by Osborn and experienced by us as a congregation, that have affected church growth, theological clarity and educational style?

(2) What was standing in our background theologically and experientially as we sought to encounter change and deal responsibly with the effects of change upon the mood of the congregation and the mind-set of the people?

(3) What is my critical analysis of the lecture series?

(4) What did the project actually accomplish, how good or faulty were our motivation and method, and what have I learned that is worth sharing?

The four chapters of this work are intended to respond to these questions in a direct way. In what follows, then, "A Suburban Church Faces Change," I shall offer the story of this project.

In Chapter I I take a closer look at the changes in theology and the way in which theology relates to Christian education in order to show something of the arena in which decisions concerning education had to be hammered out in the 1970s. And I wish to identify voices that speak to the church, sometimes challenging, sometimes clarifying, sometimes supporting the values and directions of congregations such as ours in mainstream Protestantism. I will trace the experience of a local church, and especially that of a responsible leader, searching out an adequate rationale from the standpoint of theology and education, for the objective involved.

In Chapter II I examine the role of heritage in forming our religious tradition and in shaping us as persons and as church. I examine how a theology of heritage is found in the Scriptures, expressed in personal experience, applicable to a study of denominational history and illustrated by recent Disciple authors.

I describe briefly in Chapter III how we prepared

for and offered a lecture series on Disciple history, heritage and faith, and offer a synopsis of the lecture series. I shall identify some of the important strengths of the content of the lecture series as I view them, and then lift up areas where clarifying material would have strengthened the series. Here I offer specific suggestions of concepts and materials I believe should be shared with serious students of Disciple heritage.

I test the motivation and method of our project in Chapter IV, against the minds of "devil's advocates" whose views would appear to discredit the whole enterprise. I then share briefly some of the evaluations and learnings that have left me with some positive feelings for the project itself as well as for the congregation involved and the Disciple denomination.

CHAPTER I

OUR RECENT HERITAGE IN THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION--THE CHANGING SCENE

It was not easy during the 1970s to launch an educational project with any appreciable degree of hope for a consensus of support from the educational or theological communities that what was being done was the right thing, worth doing, or done well.

Just as a local congregation found itself in a time of change, confusion and uncertainty, when its leaders looked out over the fields of religious education and theology and cried for help, they found that change, revolution, diversity of view and response and a lack of certainty prevailed there as well.

This reality has tended to make our work in the church and our attempts here a bit depressing and self-defeating. But viewed from another perspective, it makes the whole matter of living, of being the church and growing in Christian commitment and competence, at the same time compelling, challenging, and exciting.

In this latter spirit let us survey the fields before us prior to fencing off an area to call our own upon which to ground the theological posture and educational

stance from which the adult education project to be described and evaluated has come forth.

Even to begin the process is to solve one serious problem immediately: that of harboring feelings of loneliness and defensiveness. We are not the first or the only one to feel the pains of change, to note our inadequacies, to re-examine our purposes or to struggle with identity.

And should we be tempted to expect simple solutions to the problems we face at the grassroots level of the church from the field of religious education, Randolph Crump Miller quickly sobers us with the picture he gives of the predicament in which religious education finds itself. Looking at the broad field, he made this observation:

Certainly the predicament of religious education today is serious at several levels. Catholics may be more cheerful about some aspects of their educational procedures than Protestants or Jews, but their parochial schools are in difficulty. Secular educators may be more hopeful than religious educators but even in this affluent country education may become so costly we cannot afford it. Christians and Jews alike are suffering from confusion over the nature of faith. Religious institutions are re-examining their purposes and are not sure of their identity. Professional religious educators are either suffering from an identity crisis or are vanishing.¹

A similar kind of situation exists in the field of theology. It was in 1954 that James D. Smart announced

¹Randolph Crump Miller, "Predicaments and Pointers in Religious Education," in A Colloquy on Christian Education, ed. John H. Westerhoff (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1972), p. 188.

that "we are in the midst of a theological revolution in every department of theology, and in every respect of the Church's life."² We are still waiting to hear a convincing voice announce to the Church that all has been resolved.

Facing those realities at the very outset, I will proceed in this chapter to define a term, examine some changes and search for some clarity.

Theology Defined

When we say that we look to theology to give us motivation and direction in pursuing a course in Christian education to deal with the identity crisis of the church, it is important to be clear about what we mean. What, then, do we mean by "theology"?

Every thinking Christian is to some degree a theologian. Any time a person asks a serious question and relates that question to the important purposes of his life, that person deals with theology.³ Theological reflection occurs when something important happens to a person and the need is felt to share the experience. The sharing generally takes the form of verbalization. Such declarative statements of conviction about the meaning of

²James D. Smart, The Teaching Ministry of the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 64.

³Roger L. Shinn, The Educational Mission of Our Church (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1962), p. 39.

life are theological assertions.⁴

Theological reflection can be pursued by an individual or it can be expressed corporately. Thus, Smart would say that theology is that form of thought and expression characterized by the church when it takes seriously the question of its own existence and searches out the meaning of its message and mission.⁵

Hopefully, such thinking is not haphazard. There is a systematic aspect of theology. Daniel Day Williams was one who saw theology as an intellectual discipline which seeks to interpret the faith of the Christian religion (assuming that we are talking about Christian theology) "in a systematic way with reference to all the areas of human knowledge and with special concern for the tests of truth."⁶

While theology is found wherever serious reflection about Christian faith is going on individually or corporately, the commonness of the experience does not make it simple or easy. I believe that Lawrence C. Little sums it up as well as anyone. Speaking as a Christian educator, he said, concerning theology, "It is the

⁴Wayne R. Rood, Understanding Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 392.

⁵Smart, p. 33.

⁶Daniel Day Williams, "Current Theological Developments and Religious Education," in Religious Education--A Comprehensive Survey, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 44.

discipline by which man seeks to organize his religious beliefs into coherent forms." And added,

It is concerned with God and with his relation to the world and to man. It is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most difficult of the intellectual disciplines.⁷

It would seem, therefore, that whenever discord, polarization and confusion strike the church it can turn to theology and theologians for help and counsel.

There are reasons why it is not that simple at this point in time. The last few decades have witnessed rapid, frequent and extensive change in relationship to theology in two respects. First, theology itself has been in great ferment, and second, views concerning the relationship of systematic theology to Christian education have been in a state of flux as well.

I will deal first with the changes in theology, scanning quickly the changing scene, and then proceed to discuss how this relates to our understanding of Christian education. And from this I will identify the perspective from which the educational project was pursued and the rationale for pursuing it.

The Changing Theological Scene

Rapid, frequent and extensive change in theology has been the order of the day for the last four or five

⁷Lawrence C. Little, Foundations for a Philosophy of Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 144.

decades. What started out to look like a simple feud between religious conservatives and progressives in the 1920s and 1930s was complicated by a new influence called neo-orthodoxy⁸ in the late 1930s and 1940s pushing liberalism into a period of reassessment and reconstruction in the 1950s, inducing further ferment. And from there the complexity mounted so that, when Little made his own assessment of the state of theology in 1962, he supported Smart's earlier statement and revealed that Smart had been correct when he predicted in 1954 that the ferment would probably increase.⁹ Little wrote in 1962:

No one who is acquainted with the current religious situation in America can doubt that we are in the midst of a theological revolution. The study and discussion of theological problems have been more intense and widespread during the last quarter century than in any period since the Protestant reformation.¹⁰

At this point in history our theological quest is exposed to the residual fallout from both the Reformation and the Renaissance. The stage was being set there for the present confusion. And at this time we are heirs of the shifts in thought both within the Church and the social milieu in which the Church seeks to bear witness and teach.

While the plot was to thicken in the late 1960s and the 1970s, even in 1962 a number of major categories

⁸Ibid., p. 164. ⁹Smart, p. 64.

¹⁰L. Little, pp. 158-59.

of religious groups and schools of thought could be identified. A review of some of them will help us get our minds around the complexity that has grown.

Roman Catholicism

Not only having survived the Protestant Reformation but alive and well, the Roman Catholic Church would be found with one of the more effective ways of meeting tensions arising between its forms of theological expression. Salvation still is made dependent upon the sacraments and ministry of the Church, and moral standards, with the main outlines of theology, determined by papal edict. Change is deterred by an official condemnation of modernism and the findings of scholars and scientists are examined. Publications intended for the laity must bear the imprimatur of someone who knows what is permissible to believe.¹¹ This is the way it was and the way the conservative side of the Roman Catholic Church would seem to like to keep it. Little rightly observes that if civilization were monolithic, cultural interchange curtailed and education controlled by the Church (with such a mindset), theology would not be subject to so frequent an upheaval.¹²

The realities of the situation, however, are that neither the Roman Catholic system of thought nor education

¹¹Ibid., p. 161.

¹²Ibid.

are static.¹³ The statement of "Basic Principles of Modern Catechetics," as adopted at Eichstatt, refers to the proclamation of God's message of salvation to all persons, the Christ-centeredness of catechetics, the call to respond to God "by an inner change of heart manifested in a life of faith and hope and loving obedience to his commands" and refers to the need to relate teaching to "the life and thought of the people."¹⁴

Kendig Brubaker Cully reports that a new spirit of openness and dialogue has characterized Roman Catholic teachers and clergy in recent years and that since the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church has been brought into a lively contact with the real world of today where people actually dwell.¹⁵

The impact of biblical theology, which has influenced Protestantism, has not been lost on the Roman Catholic Church in recent years.¹⁶ And while the late Father Gustave Weigel declared that papal doctrine is undoubtedly the most authentic expression of Catholic beliefs and

¹³Kendig Brubaker Cully, The Search for a Christian Education--Since 1940 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 117.

¹⁴Johannes Hofinger, ed., Teaching All Nations (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961), pp. 394-400.

¹⁵K. B. Cully, p. 117.

¹⁶Hofinger, Teaching All Nations, pp. 394-400.

positions,¹⁷ there has been and continues to be considerable discussion within the theological circles of the Roman Catholic Church as to the exact status of papal encyclicals with regard to normative doctrine,¹⁸ and Weigel was quick to point out that the historical factor is always present in papal teaching.¹⁹ It would appear, then, that even in the system with the longest nails, theology does not stay nailed down. The Roman Catholic Church can embrace new practices and interpretations within a continuing "system."²⁰

The quest for relevance to daily life in the real world has brought a focus on kerygmatic theology emphasizing "those aspects of revealed truth which are in a special way meant to be lived and proclaimed,"²¹ in contrast to the older scholastic theology which aimed primarily at an intellectual elaboration of Christian doctrine.²²

Jacques Maritain, philosopher-theologian, characterizing himself as an existentialist Thomist, and stretching

¹⁷Gustave Weigel, "The Significance of the Papal Pronouncements," in The Papal Encyclicals in Their Historical Context, ed. Anne Fremantle (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956), pp. 9-20.

¹⁸K. B. Cully, p. 120.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Johannes Hofinger, The Art of Teaching Doctrine (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), p. 243.

²²*Ibid.*

the bounds of both existentialism and Thomism, has done much to relate Roman Catholic theology to art, science, and modern culture.²³ And the thought of Teilhard de Chardin has had an impact upon both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology by holding science and evolution in creative tension with classic Christian categories of thought.²⁴

Protestant orthodoxy

Based on views of the sixteenth-century reformers and based on the commonly accepted interpretations of the Bible embodied in the historic creeds, Protestant orthodoxy was characterized by:

(1) The denial of the claim of the Roman Catholic Church to be the exclusive expression of genuine Christianity,

(2) Substitution of the Bible for the Church as the source of final authority,

(3) The right of the individual to private judgment in matters of religion, and

(4) The consequent priesthood of all believers.

While these sentiments may appear correct to many of us in the Protestant tradition, we must in all honesty

²³K. B. Cully, pp. 125-26.

²⁴Nels F. S. Ferre, A Theology for Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 87.

acknowledge that the exaggeration and abuse of some of these views has contributed significantly to the fragmented and unsettled state of Protestant theology.²⁵

Secular humanism

This trend of thought stemming from the Renaissance was accentuated by the development of science, particularly from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. Theology had turned the "Copernican corner" and the medieval picture of the earth as the center of the universe and humankind as a unique form of creation had fallen away. Old orthodox doctrines of the Church were challenged and the value and veracity of revealed religion were cast into doubt.

(1) The doctrine of the fall of humankind was opposed by optimistic hopes of the continuing progress of humans.

(2) Marx viewed religion as the "opium of the people" and thus the chief enemy of the hope of humankind for a better world.

(3) Freud branded religion as outmoded childish wish fulfillment.

(4) The adequacy of human reason was elevated above belief in revelation.²⁶

Protestant sectarianism

Disagreeing over interpretations of the Bible and

²⁵L. Little, p. 160.

²⁶Ibid.

Church, Protestantism fragmented into a number of denominations and sects. Historical and social factors were involved, as well. Some of the changes that have marked the Protestant era are:

- (1) Many of the fields in which the Bible had been viewed as infallible were now opened to question by the growing acceptance of biblical criticism.
- (2) The study of comparative religions challenged the final superiority of Christianity.
- (3) The questioning of time-honored doctrines of the Church came from within as well as outside the Church.
- (4) The violent fundamentalist-modernist controversies rising to its heights in the 1920s resulted in a polarization within American Protestantism that is with us still. We will discuss these two movements briefly.

Fundamentalism arose as a movement intended to preserve orthodox Christianity. Among its marks and moods are to be found:

- (1) Insistence upon the Bible as a source of infallible, verbally inspired authority, understood as literal Word of God, and,
- (2) A list of the "fundamentals" of the Christian faith that were held to be essential to Christianity in all generations.
- (3) Claims of science were judged in terms of

consistency with the contents of the Bible as God's literal Word.

(4) Evolution as a concept was rejected.

(5) The transcendence of God was emphasized, overshadowing the divine immanence.

(6) Miracles were defended literally, based on a dichotomy between the natural world and the supernatural.

(7) The significance of Jesus was believed to rest upon his deity and this was dependent, in turn, upon the literal historicity of his virgin birth, physical resurrection and second coming.

(8) The literal word of the Bible was considered the final arbiter of truth in any contest with modern knowledge.

Modernism arose as a rather loosely organized movement spearheaded by those who were convinced that fundamentalists were causing the destruction of Christianity by forcing it into intellectual molds of the past that are no longer credible, making it impossible to be embraced by informed modern persons. They distinguished between the "abiding experiences" of Christianity and the "changing categories" in which at any given time these may be expressed. Essence and thought patterns were thus distinguished from one another. They insisted on modernizing Christian theology to match up with modern knowledge. These are some of the views that underwent revision:

(1) Views of the nature of the universe and human-kind were geared to scientific findings.

(2) Theories of evolution were accommodated.

(3) The results of biblical criticism were held to make a literal interpretation of the Bible untenable.

(4) Miracle stories in the Bible were critically examined and explained as natural events interpreted in pre-scientific thought patterns.

(5) Stress upon the divine immanence overshadowed the concept of the transcendence of God.

(6) The virgin birth, physical resurrection and second coming were de-emphasized as the sole basis for belief in the divinity of Jesus. In their place the foundations for the authority of Jesus were traced to his pre-eminence as an exemplar of the divine nature that is implicit in every human being. He was seen as the person we were meant to be who exemplified the spirit that must obtain in us all to experience fulfillment.²⁷

The motivation of both fundamentalists and modernists was laudable. Fundamentalists were seeking to defend Christianity by reiteration of its ancient formularies and time-honored creeds. Modernists, on the other hand, were convinced that the only way to defend Christianity was to

²⁷Ibid., pp. 161-62.

restate its affirmations in the contemporary vernacular.²⁸

The weaknesses in both of the above positions soon became self-evident to perceptive minds in both camps, and changes were called for as early as the 1930s. Changes in terminology favored by those who are heir to the schools of thought continuing from these movements are one register of this. The terms "conservative" and "evangelical" are now more popular in many places than "fundamentalist" and the term "liberal" is more popular than "modernist." Occasionally one will make reference to being "neo-liberal," usually signifying those whose liberalism has been chastened by neo-orthodoxy, which will be discussed below.

No sooner had fundamentalism and modernism begun to slow than another wave of theology crashed upon the American shore. As early as the mid-1930s, but especially in the 1940s and 1950s, the theological movement that attracted the greatest attention in American Protestantism was known as neo-orthodoxy.

Neo-orthodoxy

This new wave of theology was labeled "Neo-Orthodoxy" or "Neo-Reformation Theology," because Karl Barth and its other architects reasserted in large part the faith of the Protestant reformers, especially of Luther

²⁸Ibid., p. 163; Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, Journey in Faith (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), pp. 360-86.

and Calvin. It was called also "Theology of Crisis" and "Dialectical Theology."²⁹

Neo-orthodoxy holds features in common with both fundamentalism and modernism but cannot be identified with either. Like fundamentalism it insists on the validity of the biblical revelation. Like modernism, it means to take biblical criticism seriously.³⁰

Characteristic of the theology of Karl Barth is the affirmation of the absoluteness and exclusiveness of the biblical witness to God's grace in Christ. It is in Scripture alone that the message of God's grace and reconciliation is given.³¹ Barth, however, escapes legalism and literalism of traditional fundamentalist interpretations of Scriptural authority. The acceptance of biblical criticism is reflected in his characteristic views we list. Among them are these:

(1) Often truths of the Bible are regarded as "myths," not in the sense of falsehood but as signifying a symbolic nature which cannot be fully expressed in ordinary language.

(2) The Bible is understood to contain the Word of God but is not identified as the Word of God in a literal word-by-word sense.

²⁹L. Little, p. 164.

³⁰Williams, p. 45.

³¹Ibid.

(3) Revelation is not understood to be propositional truth and knowledge about God. What is revealed through Scripture is God himself. One's appropriate response is not believing correct doctrines line-by-line but giving oneself to God in simple love and trust.

(4) The transcendence of God is emphasized. Natural theology is discounted. God is not revealed in nature but only through his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

(5) Humans are seen as alienated sinners who cannot find God and salvation by their own efforts. Humans are dependent upon the divine initiative through revelation.

(6) Faith is not seen primarily as the acceptance of doctrine and intellectual propositions but as radical commitment of life in the existential situation.

(7) God is free and by grace grants freedom to humankind.

(8) Life is paradoxical and truth is not reducible to a set of simple rational principles.

(9) Science is impotent to discover divine truth. Theology has its own sphere.

(10) Acculturated Christianity is in crisis.³²

(11) The condition of humankind is given hope not by moral achievement and behavior modification but through

³²L. Little, p. 165.

trust in God and the present power of the divine spirit to renew and fulfill all of life.³³

While neo-orthodoxy has not remained in the central focus of theological attention, for many it did indeed chasten the old liberalism and sober the easy humanistic optimism that characterized liberal thought early in this century.

Two things should be understood to put the decline of liberal theology into perspective. One is that liberalism was to be seen in two ways which are not always kept in creative tension. In one view, liberalism was a spirit, a way of thinking, rather than a set of doctrines. It was a spirit of tentativeness and openness that sought freedom from prior commitments and a willingness to break through old thought patterns in order to formulate new. But second, liberalism did tend to crystallize into a particular body of doctrines giving a distinctive exposition to the basic beliefs of Christians. Among them were:

(1) The infinite dignity and value of humankind, possessing unlimited potential for growth.

(2) The continuity of the divine being with his creation (divine immanence).

(3) Jesus Christ was the prototype of humanity at its best and highest.

³³Williams, p. 46.

(4) Christianity was principally an ethical religion, seeking social justice through the reconstruction of the forms of social organization.

(5) Revelation was progressive building up of a body of knowledge by which persons and society might be transformed.

(6) The Bible was the record of the progressive development of the religious consciousness of humankind.

(7) Salvation was to be attained by the gradual growth in knowledge and self-control.³⁴

The decline of liberal theology under the impact of neo-orthodoxy was caused primarily by its failure to give a satisfactory explanation to enough Christians of the realities that confronted them in daily experience. Liberal optimism about human nature was shattered by the outbreak of startling forms of inhumanity within Western civilization, especially in the very home of the Protestant Reformation. World War II, following the Great Depression in America, had a devastating effect. Modern humankind, confronted by evil in its stark reality, began to find the biblical descriptions of it credible once more. Further, the idea of inevitable progress of the human race no longer appeared viable. Identifying divinity with the natural

³⁴David W. Jewell, "Liberalism," in The Westminster Dictionary of Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 19), pp. 390 ff.

process by which humans move toward fulfillment of their destiny seemed hard to distinguish from humanism in which all belief in God as a distinct reality is abandoned.³⁵

Smart aptly observed that

the bankruptcy of unreconstructed liberalism was impossible to conceal and the exposure was helped forward by theologians such as Barth and Brunner in Europe and Reinhold Niebuhr in America.³⁶

Nevertheless, liberalism did not fall down dead. There is a liberalist succession³⁷ just as Roman Catholicism survived the Protestant Reformation. But reconstruction in liberal theology has been going on for the past three decades and continues. And a rash of new theologies has flashed on the scene, as Osborn has suggested earlier.

Along the way, Paul Tillich, a German import, called himself the "last liberal" but seemed to live on the boundary between neo-orthodoxy and liberalism, joining with each in various ways, yet, in the end, cutting his own theological groove.³⁸

Another German, Rudolf Bultmann, was not at home in either neo-orthodoxy or liberalism.³⁹ He says of himself:

I have endeavored throughout my entire work to carry farther the tradition of historical-critical research

³⁵Smart, The Teaching Ministry of the Church, p. 63.

³⁶Ibid. ³⁷K. B. Cully, pp. 26-40.

³⁸William E. Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 171.

³⁹James C. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought from the Enlightenment to Vatican II (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 357-63.

as it was practiced in "liberal" theology and to make our recent theological knowledge the more fruitful as a result.⁴⁰

A modern man who took science seriously, Bultmann enraged religious conservatives by rejecting the division of the world into natural and supernatural, saying:

Modern men take it for granted that the course of nature and history, like their own inner life and their practical life, is nowhere interrupted by the intervention of supernatural powers.⁴¹

He was most appreciated by liberals for his program of demythologizing the New Testament, finding the world view there as a three-storied structure (earth in the center, the heaven above as the abode of God and the celestial beings, and the underworld beneath--hell) impossible in our day and age. Tracing the language and world view of the New Testament mythology to the eschatology of the late Jewish apocalyptic and the redemptive myths of Gnosticism, Bultmann called, not for the elimination of the New Testament mythology, but for it to be interpreted in terms of its underlying intention.⁴² Working in theology from a philosophical base in Martin Heidegger's existentialism, Bultmann made friends among liberals but divided from neo-orthodoxy as this pursuit brought him more and more

⁴⁰Charles W. Kegley, ed., The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. xxiv.

⁴¹Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 15-16.

⁴²Kegley, p. xxiv.

into opposition to Karl Barth. Basically the question was: Shall theology be based on the word to which faith responds or on the faith which responds to the word?⁴³

The "Worldly Christianity" of a third German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has had wide reading and influence, especially now that we are beyond sentimentalizing his martyrdom by Hitler in 1945. He fits no neat category. His attack on "cheap grace"⁴⁴ helps to test and clarify the heavy emphasis on grace in neo-orthodoxy. I feel, however, that his later thought has been used to support a secularized version of Christianity in a way he never intended.

It seems appropriate to draw a line here before looking at the contemporary scene, for Livingston is probably correct in declaring:

Despite the problem that Neo-Orthodoxy has bequeathed to a new generation of theologians, it remains the most formative movement in Protestant theology in the twentieth century.⁴⁵

The Current Theological Search

Now that death has silenced the "big names" in theology, William Hordern has re-surveyed the scene in

⁴³James D. Smart, The Divided Mind of Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 197-201.

⁴⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 45-60.

⁴⁵Livingston, p. 341.

order to update his book on theology for laymen (but, I suspect, read mostly by pastors and educators in the church) and asked:

Where are the successors to the theological giants now recently dead? Today we look in vain for anyone who appears likely to make a contribution in any way comparable to that made by the theologians at whom we have looked.⁴⁶

And he sees not just two or three or even four schools of thought led by major thinkers. He describes what comes to view in these terms: "On the contrary, it seems that theology is becoming atomized into an increasingly baffling number of trends, schools, and moods."⁴⁷

Sara Little looks out upon the fields of theology with eyes of a religious educator and has questions with a similar ring. She asks:

Are we "between" theologies--that is, waiting for some new giants to appear and point us in new directions? Or are these numerous offerings in contemporary theology to be viewed as theological fragments, the most appropriate response to the current situation? Whatever the designation, theology is in trouble.⁴⁸

The "numerous offerings" to which Sara Little refers include such contemporary theologies as Death of God, Theology in Art, Theology of Hope, Theology in Group Experience, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, and

⁴⁶Hordern, p. 230.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Sara Little, "Theology and Religious Education," in Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 34.

Black Theology. Little is not hostile to any of these as such. She is certainly not indifferent to the groups and persons to which these schools of thought hope to speak or on behalf of whom they hope to be advocates. As an educator, however, she aptly observes that these seem to be related to problems, not systems of thought.⁴⁹

These current theologies may be the result of a healthy and commendable quest for relevancy. But it is not difficult to understand the impatience of either educators whose churches can ill afford to replace their curriculum every six months or of theologians who fear that the results will be tunnel vision and loss of authenticity in theology. Nels F. S. Ferré wears both hats as he complains:

Contemporary theology--while it may be the most relevant, is usually culture-conditioned to the point that it more reflects the culture than challenges it. Contemporary theology at the crest of its everbreaking wave is largely futile by being fugitive. Today it is liberal theology, tomorrow it is Neo-Orthodoxy, then the swing may be to Tillich the following day, but these days hardly pass before the death of God theology is upon us; and yet one more day and educators want to forget they fell prey to so transitory a mood. Contemporary theology makes most noise when the waves break, but the only enduring reality is the sea itself that casts up the restless waves. The authentic theologian concerns himself mostly with the ocean even while he must adjust his bark to the current waves.⁵⁰

Yet, amid the cries of despair, there has been recognition that some substantive theological work is

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ferré, p. 30.

currently being done. Iris Cully credited Wolfhart Pannenberg, German theologian, with continuing with his "circle of theologians" to explore the relation of revelation to universal history via the Judaic-Christian tradition. She notes, too, that more conservative theologians continue to work steadfastly at the theological task, some moving deliberately to place theology in its historical framework and to relate it to social concerns.⁵¹ One might expect the conservative evangelicals to be a solid block of conviction amid the swirling sea of change. But, while evangelicalism is currently thriving, responsible reporters indicate that a diversity of views regarding the authority, inspiration and interpretation of the Bible has brought the evangelical group to a point of identity crisis.⁵²

Closer to catching major attention and even heralded as a "theology of the space age" is Process Theology. For Iris Cully sees Process Theology in a positive position of relevance to the concerns of power, conflict and self-determination.⁵³

Is Process Theology the answer for those of us

⁵¹Iris Cully, Change, Conflict, and Self-Determination (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 81-83.

⁵²Robert K. Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979), pp. 1-7.

⁵³Iris Cully, pp. 81-83.

concerned about change? Sara Little thinks it might be. Applauding the word of the likes of John Cobb, Jr. and Schubert Ogden, she thinks Process Theology is probably the most significant theological enterprise in America. "Providing continuity with Whiteheadian philosophical traditions," she says, "it appears peculiarly appropriate for a world self-conscious about change."⁵⁴

Miller is another Christian educator who agrees that Process Theology is a view of things to be taken seriously as one that may serve the future as well as contemporary needs.⁵⁵ He is intrigued by the way this theology uses as a primary model the human body, which is interrelated and organic so that in its parts it is constantly becoming and perishing, and yet has a continuing identity until death.⁵⁶

Actually, this is not exactly a new concept. This way of thinking has a long history going back at least to Heraclitus and beyond to the Orient. But the center of its modern relevance is the work of Alfred North Whitehead.⁵⁷

Central to this theological viewpoint is that God is persuasive love. There is room for our experience of

⁵⁴Sara Little, pp.

⁵⁵Randolph Crump Miller, "The Religious Education We Need," in Toward the Renewal of Christian Education, ed. James Michael Lee (Mishawaka, IN: Religious Education Press, 1977), p. 57.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ferré, p. 30.

change, of chance, of emerging of novelty, of freedom. We become in some real and significant sense co-creators with God of the world in which we live. In Process Theology, the God who is experienced is fitted into a coherent system of thought. God is everlasting as potential source of values not yet realized. God is immanent as persuasive love prehending all that becomes and perishes, taking it into God's own nature. In this view, God shares our sufferings and joys and is altered by them, so that we no longer think of God as incapable of passion or change.

The enthusiasm that appears to be growing for Process Theology raises the question of whether or not a new theological consensus has come, or at least is near. Were it true, nothing could please a Disciple, desiring Christian unity, more.

To answer the question, I will narrow the focus of attention for a while on my own denomination.

Disciples have a stake in the current theological search since (1) Disciples have not had a distinctive theology of their own since their leadership moved away from a scholasticism that marked the latter half of the nineteenth century in their history, and (2) Disciples have produced few distinctive and well-known theologians.⁵⁸

The late George Beazley observed in 1973 that the

⁵⁸Beazley, pp. 401-2.

present theological situation makes theological thinking difficult for Disciples and expressed the need for a few strong theological and biblical thinkers, able to both reflect on their heritage and reformulate its most lasting insights, to relate that heritage to some school of contemporary thought which might provide freshness and contemporaneity.⁵⁹

William Baird is a theologically aware Disciple New Testament scholar, and former mentor of this writer, who has offered himself to the task Beazley described above. Agreeing that neo-orthodoxy is no longer on the cutting edge of theology⁶⁰ (Disciples never readily received it anyway⁶¹). Baird shares an enthusiasm for Process Theology with Beazley.⁶² Baird sees it as one of two hopeful theological perspectives undergoing growth in American theology at the present time. His personal assessment reads:

Students of Charles Hartshorne have found in Whiteheadian process philosophy the ontological ground for a theology which can grapple with the cosmic problem while continuing, especially in the work of Schubert Ogden and John Cobb, to take seriously the Christian tradition and even discuss the finality of Christ.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 402.

⁶⁰ William Baird, The Quest of the Christ of Faith (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), p. 156.

⁶¹ Beazley, p. 402.

⁶² Baird, p. 156.

⁶³ Ibid.

Cobb himself indicates that, for him, the importance of Whiteheadian philosophy and the teachings of Hartshorne have deepened with time and experience, and pursues earnestly the theological problem of ultimacy and universality of Christ. Referring to his rationale for writing his recent volume, Christ in a Pluralistic Age, he wrote:

I want to see how the parochial Christian Way we have inherited can be transformed, in faithfulness to Christ, into a Way which includes the truth of other ways, and can therefore come to be what it now is not--the Way.⁶⁴

But Baird is also mindful of the theological work of students of H. Richard Niebuhr as another significant development on the American scene. He notes particularly Van Austin Harvey and Gordon Kaufman as acknowledging the importance of historical revelation and employing a methodology that can speak meaningfully about the acts of God. They are attempting to comprehend the whole of reality from a historicist's perspective, wrestling honestly with how one can, with integrity, be at once a historian and a Christian.⁶⁵

A cursory reading of Baird's observation would tend to depress the reader with the fear that the fragmentation of theology is the continuing story. But the mindset of

⁶⁴John B. Cobb, Jr., "A Critical View of Inherited Theology," Christian Century, XCVII,6 (February 20, 1980) pp. 195-96; cf. John B. Cobb, Jr. Christ in a Pluralistic Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).

⁶⁵Baird, p. 156.

these men is a source of encouragement even if their work is not part of a consensus just now. Kaufman, for instance, says clearly that his theological pursuit since the breakdown of the neo-orthodox consensus is developed with the hope that his theological input will be of help "to theologians of all persuasions, liberal or conservative, Whiteheadian or existentialist or revolutionary, Protestant or Catholic or Jewish."⁶⁶ He truly does believe that the methodological conception to which he has come will prove illuminating for theologians of very different commitments.⁶⁷

In his own way, Kaufman shares with Cobb the desire to move theology along a path toward comprehensiveness and consistency, articulating a theological worldview as a whole from which other theological issues can be addressed. While his theology has grown beyond a simplistic view of revelation, he still affirms, as he did in his book, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, that "the Christian faith and vocabulary are essentially historicistic" in orientation.⁶⁸

Harvey helps us put in perspective the shift from

⁶⁶ Gordon D. Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), p. x.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

dialectical theology, noting that the various attempts of the dialectical theologians to reconcile Christian belief with the morality of historical knowledge proved unstable. "Neither Bultmann, Tillich nor Barth," he says, "makes it clear how it is possible to be both a critical historian and a believer."⁶⁹ For Harvey the breakup of the general position of dialectical theology in a subsequent theological generation was inevitable since (1) there would be those who believe that the tension could only be relaxed by dropping all reference to a unique act of God in Christ while, (2) there would, on the other hand, be those who argue that the distinctive nature of Christian faith could be preserved only by insisting on the decisive importance of the historical Jesus and by exploring the consequences of this for historical understanding.⁷⁰ As we have seen, such a rupture did become evident during the demythologizing debate.

Harvey affirms that Christian belief is anchored in history. He states it as follows:

The Christian community cannot disavow its own historical past, a past that constitutes the Christ event as the decisive one for its self-understanding, consequently, it has no other vocation than to re-present the proclamation about Jesus again and again.⁷¹

But again, he, like Cobb, is concerned to grasp

⁶⁹ Van Austin Harvey, The Historian and the Believer (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. xii.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 288.

⁷¹ Ibid.

and articulate the universality of this seemingly parochial proclamation. For he says this:

On the other hand, the significance of Jesus lies precisely in the relevance of his image for understanding that final reality which confronts men in all events.⁷²

So, while a theological consensus has not emerged, there are some positive signs before us. It is encouraging to find theologians inclined toward dialogue and mutual helpfulness rather than confrontation and debate. And Baird is doubtless correct that "theological syntheses are born, not made,--they come only in the fullness of time."⁷³ And, as Schubert Ogden observes, even if such should appear, contemporary theological and philosophical insights are always subject to being superceded.⁷⁴

I note with interest that the two schools of thought toward which Baird points share in common the desire to deal responsibly with the heritage of the Christian faith and move in the direction of universality. While we cannot herald the dawning of a new theological age marked by consensus, the importance of heritage to the theological task can be affirmed. It is this theme that speaks to us in this project and will be addressed more fully in the chapter to come. We will return to the theme of heritage, then, though not with any attitude that a panacea has been

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Baird, p. 157.

⁷⁴Schubert M. Ogden, The Reality of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 22.

found for the ills of change.

Yet, even if we were convinced that we had found a tack in theology that would sail us past the troublesome shoals, we are still far from having clear sailing. For even if theology were suddenly to stabilize and, through depth and dialogue, speak to us a consensus, the sea of change would be far from calm. For there is disagreement as well concerning the role theology is to play in the Church's program of education. I turn now to examine this area of concern.

The Relationship of Theology to Christian Education

There is a second major area of instability and change one runs into in turning to theology and education for help in dealing with the effects of change upon the church's sense of identity. It is that field of thought that describes the place theology holds in respect to Christian education and vice versa. We have noted that theologians do not agree with one another. Neither do theologians and religious educators agree about the role theology plays in respect to education. Again, there has been no abiding consensus for the last four or five decades. And once again Smart interprets the times for us. "The recent past," he declared, "has beheld a great vagueness about where education belongs in the field of

theology."⁷⁵ That was more than two decades ago.

From his vantage point at that time Smart could recognize several different attitudes. Among them there were, first, educators who had denied that theology has anything to do with education and bitterly resented the raising of theological questions in the educational realm and, second, there were theologians who had regarded Christian education as nothing more than a study of educational psychology and techniques and had withheld from it recognition as an essential theological discipline.⁷⁶

To gain a perspective on this area of concern we will do well to back up to about 1940. It was about then that it became clear that the intellectual foundations of the liberal religious education movement had eroded considerably. Harrison Elliott had, at that time, drawn the issue into sharp focus, noting the impact of neo-orthodox theology which was calling the Church back to the historical formulations of the Christian religion and repudiating the adjustments that had been made in response to scientific and social developments. Religious education was seen in league with secularism.⁷⁷ Elliott himself did not embrace the neo-orthodox view, but the times were not with him.

⁷⁵Smart, The Teaching Ministry of the Church, p. 24.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Harrison S. Elliott, Can Religious Education Be Christian? (New York: Macmillan, 1940), p. 9.

Then, in 1950, with what appeared to be superb timing, Miller identified what he called the "clue" to Christian education. He wanted to find a theology for Christian education that would undergird the objectives, theory and methods. His question was how best to relate content and method in an organic whole. He was also concerned with the need to integrate evangelism into the educational program and the need to get more parent participation in religious nurture. His answer:

I found as I thought upon the problem that the "clue" would be found in the relevance of theology to the whole of life, and that with this clue I could open doors of the associated questions of method, evangelism, and parent cooperation.⁷⁸

Miller's position was well received and did bring some consensus into the educational work of the church, so much that in 1966 Howard Grimes declared: "The struggle for the recognition of the crucial nature of theology in relation to Christian teaching has probably been won."⁷⁹

Yet, hardly a decade later the question arose as to the relation between theology and religious education and the answer seemed to be that theology was no longer commonly accepted as the key, the clue.

What had happened? Apparently at least some

⁷⁸Randolph Crump Miller, The Clue to Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), pp. vii ff.

⁷⁹Marvin J. Taylor, ed., An Introduction to Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 39.

educators gave the appearance of highhandedness. Sara Little reports that educators were accused of being imperialistic. Viewing education as a kind of messiah, they were seen as giving inadequate attention to the explicit and implicit theology that was being taught.⁸⁰ A reaction set in against this. Perhaps Miller's intent had been misunderstood. Sara Little correctly observes that when Miller spoke of the "clue," he was not referring to a "correct" theology formulated as doctrine to be transmitted through education. For Miller, theology had to do with the "truth about God in relation to man." Truth lay in the experienced reality of the relationship; theology lay in the interpretation of that reality, informed by biblical witness. By way of contrast, Smart gave more attention to correct belief and showed great concern for the educational task of developing a theologically literate generation.⁸¹

But even with the divergence in viewpoints, the writings of these and others as well as curriculum developments in churches, evidenced a new detente between theology and education.

Then the decade of the 1960s was the "turbulent sixties" which brought a fundamental shift in the American

⁸⁰S. Little, p. 30.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 31.

moral and religious attitudes. Resulting external forces as well as self-criticism from within shifted the world of religious education again. By the 1970s theology was no longer agreed upon as the "clue" and general educational philosophy and practice were again "respectable."⁸²

In order to put the relationship of theology to education in perspective Sara Little identified the alternatives as she perceived them. They appear below.

(1) Theology may be seen as content to be taught, based on Webster's definition of theology as "rational interpretation of religious faith, practice and experience, thus, exploration of meaning.

(2) Theology may be taken as norm, i.e., educators may take the stance of a theologian so that contributions from the behavioral sciences or other discipline may be screened according to their appropriateness to theological presuppositions.

(3) Theology may be seen as irrelevant. This is the "religious" education in contrast to the "Christian" education point of view. Theology is viewed as irrelevant since education is essentially religious with the goal of personal growth and a search for truth. Wherever truth is found it functions as meaning, as religion for the seeker, filling the need of theology, or education is

⁸²Ibid.

seen primarily as the work of practitioners, operating pragmatically.

(4) "Doing" theology is educating. In this view one is educated as one inquires into the meanings of events with reference to God's presence and activity in the past and his purpose for the future. In this view Christian education both draws upon theological insight provided by the tradition and thought of the church but develops a substantive contribution to the theological formulations of the church. (The views of both Miller and Williams appear to be reflected in this view.⁸³)

(5) Education in dialogue with theology. In this view it is assumed that the various disciplines are independent, each with its own recognizable functions. Theology, along with such disciplines as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, both influences and is responsive to these other disciplines. They do not emerge from some application of theological or theoretical formulations. Decisions are made and changed as dialogue continues. This is a collegial approach to education in which theology may or may not function in a somewhat normative fashion.⁸⁴

We live in a time of educational and theological pluralism and Sara Little finds only one of these alternatives totally unacceptable, and that is the view that

⁸³Williams, p. 52.

⁸⁴S. Little, pp. 31-33.

theology is irrelevant. I agree with her reasoning for rejecting this view as stated:

When theology is viewed as irrelevant, what happens may be education, but it is not likely to be religious education and certainly not Christian education. It is more likely to be conditioning or training than education.⁸⁵

Out of this review of alternatives four propositions emerged which I find clarifying and helpful. And it is among these that we find support for the kind of thing we have tried to do in adult education which will be discussed in Chapters III and IV. I share those four propositions here with my own comments according to the way I find myself drawing from them and/or identifying with them.

1. There is a gospel message which is independent of the various processes by which it is communicated--a message which becomes available in different ways, depending on the particular process operative at any given time.⁸⁶

I take this to mean that theology may indeed become content to be taught, rightly understood. I agree with Thomas Green that what is to be sought in this regard is an approach to teaching that is not indoctrination but one that encourages a person to explore, to ask questions, to find what is reasonable to accept and believe.⁸⁷ And

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸⁷ Thomas Green, The Activities of Teaching (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 67.

whether re-telling the Gospel story or the story of one's church heritage in order to offer both opportunity for understanding and for commitment, I consider this relationship to theology to be valid.

2. The Message, or content, to some extent at least, should help shape the process by which it is communicated. It offers a point of reference for interpretation and evaluation of practices, systems, and structures set up as instruments for communication.⁸⁸

So there is a sense in which theology can serve as a norm. It does not give a theologian license to stand outside the educative process and hand in prescribed doctrinal formulations, but theology can, in an acceptable way, serve to interpret knowledge about the tradition and the community out of which the community emerged.⁸⁹

It is here that confusion begins to clear and there is clear support for the rationale behind our educational project. For I see the role of the theology I shall describe in Chapter II as precisely making knowledge available and interpreting the tradition of the community out of which our denomination has emerged so that persons may make informed decisions about their commitment and response.

3. Knowledge is comprehended, synthesized, internalized, changed, and enlarged when it is integrally related to issues in human existence.⁹⁰

⁸⁸S. Little, p. 37.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

This proposition deals with the alternative view that education can take the form of "doing" theology. It is an appealing form of interaction between theology and education that involves real dialogue, openness and creativity. I cherish this kind of aliveness for any project in Christian education conducted under the auspices of the church.

4. The theoretical work of the educator necessitates consideration not only of situations and cultural conditions, but also of contributions and insights from appropriate disciplines--theology, for example, as one of the more important disciplines for religious education.⁹¹

This proposition tempers Miller's earlier stand of calling theology the "clue" to Christian education without totally emasculating it. It still allows theology a crucial role while insisting that it must be related to psychology and the social sciences as decisions concerning education are made. This proposition would make no one thing the "clue" with the intention that education should be approached in a way that takes into account the "gifts" of the members of any given religious community, viewed in this universal setting. It is the kind of mood Williams described.⁹² It seems to me that adherence to this principle would help make Christian education not only theologically informed but psychologically healthy and socially productive. It should cause us to forego a provincial

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Williams, p. 44.

approach to education in the church. And though that may put us under more pressure to be knowledgeable and more broadly competent, that is good pressure.

"We are dealing with a complex relationship," says Williams, "which requires continued analysis from both sides."⁹³ So we will not expect simplistic, once-for-all answers. But we can take responsibility for where we stand, at any given time, in the midst of the continuing dialogue.

I find myself much in accord with what Smart has said, at this point. He understands the relation of education to theology by defining theology as a function of the Church and then discussing the Church. For him the Church is seen as a human instrument called into being by God's self-disclosure in his Word. The neo-orthodox influence still comes through as he speaks of the people of God living in response to God's witness in the world, that through them God may be known ever more widely as he is known to them. I agree that the revelation of God creates the Church. "Apart from the revelation, says Smart, "it has no real existence."⁹⁴

I also agree with Smart that the revelation demands a human channel of communication. And what is called

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Smart, The Teaching Ministry of the Church, p. 25.

for is not mere information about God but God himself, a truth that is at the same time a life. Smart's statement is:

God reveals himself to persons that through them he may become known to yet other persons, and the Church is the fellowship of those persons to whom and through whom God is making himself known.⁹⁵

This seems verified when we study the Church's heritage and spend much of the time talking about persons.

I further agree that no matter how seemingly complete and passionate our faith, there is always in the Church on Earth a measure of failure and perversion both in its hearing of the Word and in its response to it.⁹⁶

So theology, as a lively and crucial discipline, serves the Church and education as the watchtower that scans life and faith in order to detect the presence of blindness and unfaithfulness and raise the urgent, necessary questions.

I can identify, too, with Smart's view that the greatest threats to the Church's life and authenticity are within, not outside, and that the first task of theology is to "expose the confusion and uncertainty of the Church concerning itself and inquire how the Church can most truly be the Church."⁹⁷

While not everyone will agree, I feel this kind of stand does help clear the air. And Williams appears

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 30.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 33.

to have given support to the position assumed here when he wrote:

A serious separation of theology and education need not take place if it is recognized that all Christian practice must maintain its integral relation to the ultimate source of faith in the word of God made personal in Jesus Christ, and if in theology full weight is given to the special insight which comes from the appropriation of the word of God in the activities of Christian nurture.⁹⁸

As Williams surveyed the scene in which theology and education, in dialogue, seek to serve God within the Church he was struck with this awareness. "The consciousness of the Protestant heritage [emphasis mine] is a major factor in the contemporary church," he wrote.⁹⁹

A grasp of our heritage as part of a religious movement within American Protestantism has indeed proved important to us in the congregation I serve and in which the project in Christian education to be described later was pursued. A review of our heritage has served as a foundation for our continuing theological quest and helped enable us to regain a sense of identity and integrity as a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It has been a necessary step in preparing the congregation to define and renew itself.

There has emerged for us, then, in our confrontation with change, and our attempts to deal constructively with it, a way of thinking which I choose to call a

⁹⁸Williams, p.

⁹⁹Ibid.

theology of heritage. I am not proposing, here, a new form of "pop" theology to add to the list. Neither am I jumping on a theological bandwagon such as is offered by Thomas C. Oden in his recent book, Agenda for Theology,¹⁰⁰ calling for a radical turn from attempts to accommodate modernity and a focus on the first twelve centuries of Christianity as normative for Christian theology. It is simply the stance I have taken in approaching this particular project in Christian education. It is a form of reflection that takes roots seriously and engages in a quest for understanding the forces, events and odyssey that have shaped our religious movement and experience and how God uses that to which we have become heir to sharpen our sense of self-definition and clarify the bases upon which we make our responses and decisions in the current situation in which we find ourselves. It affirms that God speaks to us in and through what we have received from the past, and from what already is, in order to give us definition, form and meaning.

In Chapter II I will approach a theology of heritage from four angles of vision to illustrate its meaning to me and how it contributes to the educational project to be described and evaluated in Chapters II and IV.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas C. Oden, Agenda for Theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 28-29, 45, 151.

CHAPTER II

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF HERITAGE

To review one's religious heritage is an exercise in theology. Implicit in such a pursuit are questions like "Where is God in the midst of all this?", "What does the story we are tracing have to do with our present condition and future possibilities?", and "How does God address us through what has gone on before us?" To respond to such questions is to make a theological statement.

What, then, is the theology that informs and undergirds this project, which provides its rationale and its bid for acceptance as a distinctively Christian as well as educationally viable and meaningful enterprise?

I call it a theology of heritage. It is an affirmation that our faith and religious identity do not come out of the air but are historically mediated and conditioned. It pursues an understanding of the role of heritage in God's program for us individually as persons and corporately as church.

The theology of heritage we find in reflecting upon a review of our heritage is the declaration that when we encounter God at work in life through what has gone before, we find meaning which helps us know our identity and

claim the opportunity to respond to the reality of this givenness with freedom and creativity--even gratitude and love.

I believe some of the dimensions of this theology can come into clearer focus if we will examine some of the ways in which it is experienced. I would affirm that the theology of heritage of which I speak is (1) grounded in biblical theology, (2) verified in personal experience, (3) applicable to a study of denominational history and (4) illustrated in recent articles by Disciple authors concerning Disciple heritage. I will proceed now to discuss and develop the theology of heritage I have indicated above, along the lines of these four areas.

A Theology of Heritage--Grounded in Biblical Theology

Kendig Brubaker Cully recognizes two potent influences that have emerged during the recent decades of confusion and change in the theological world which have participated in bringing theology and education into a closer working relationship. They are (1) the revival of biblical theology and (2) the ecumenical movement. In both of these the historical dimension has been uppermost. This has had its effect upon educational thinking.

The re-emphasis on biblical studies has brought scholars into new touch with history. "Since God's revelatory actions were in historical events," he wrote, "no

biblical scholar could any longer avoid the necessity of thinking through the meaning of historical events."¹

In connection with the ecumenical movement, it seems that most every participating branch of the one Church of Christ has had to re-examine its own historical roots and developments in order to communicate its self-understanding to the other denominations.²

Amos Wilder called scholarship to deal with the "world story," beginning with creation and running through the calling and proving of Israel, the coming of the Messiah and the New Israel (Church) on to the judgement and the new creation. His comment was:

This story had elements that could be called historical and others that were non-historical. Yet, for the believer, no part was mere chronicle; sober narrative and heavenly transactions belonged alike to the salvation dream.³

Being incurably biblical and ecumenical in orientation, we as Disciples find a ready affinity with scholars who have such a posture.

As we step back from our work to gain a perspective on this project, then, it is not surprising to find who we are standing near. Miller is still perhaps our chief mentor. For he is continuing to say that theology is a

¹K. B. Cully, p. 169.

²Ibid., pp.

³Amos Wilder, New Testament Faith for Today (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 248.

crucial factor in determining the nature of Christian education. I readily identify with his rationale and find that, as I led forth in structuring a study of Disciple heritage in our congregation, I was drawing upon pre-suppositions similar to Miller's. He declares that our thinking about God indicates, in turn, what we can do about education. And our understanding of the nature of the teacher or pupil, or about human nature, affects not only the content and methods of education, but the limits of education as well.⁴

When Miller himself proceeded to write his own theology of Christian education he drew directly upon biblical theology, outlining the story of the Bible in similar fashion to Bernhard W. Anderson's The Unfolding Drama of the Bible. I understand that he arrived at this independently, but, be that as it may, he based his book on the drama of our salvation as five acts of a play, (1) Creation, (2) Covenant, (3) Christ, (4) Church and (5) Consummation.⁵

Miller thus sought acceptance of the "old story of salvation" which is relevant to the human situation, remembering his definition of theology as "truth-about-God-in-relation-to-man." Persons participate in the drama and become the Church as they open their lives to the Spirit's

⁴Miller, "The Religious Education We Need," p. 38.

⁵Miller, Randolph Crump, Biblical Theology and Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956) pp. 16-31.

rule in their hearts and enter into a special quality of fellowship with God and one another.⁶

The unfolding drama of the Bible discloses as the main actor, as it were, a God who has an intense interest in heritage as a vehicle for launching and perpetuating his work. Roots are set down in history and from those roots traditions build which give form and meaning to the community of faith, the people of God. Events, the mighty acts of God, produce a people. The people of God in history are formed by response to specific historical events in which they participate and the time and circumstances in history out of which they emerge. Part of their role is to appropriate and share their heritage, not only to maintain their own identity and integrity. Beyond this they are to fulfill the mission they are given in history. Again and again in the Bible the people of God, whether by instruction or simply in response to their circumstances, point to their roots and describe their heritage to verify their identity. This occurs in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

The theology of heritage in the Old Testament

The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy holds an excellent example of this to which I have been referring. Here,

⁶Randolph Crump Miller, Biblical Theology and Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 117.

fathers are commanded to teach their children (verses 6 and 7) and to respond to the questions of their sons about the meaning of their religious traditions (testimonies, statutes, ordinances) by sharing with them their religious heritage (verses 20-25).

Israelite children were taught the old, old story of God's redemptive and gracious acts, chief among which were his deliverance from Egyptian slavery and his gift of a land in which to live. The words in Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, are written from the standpoint of a community long settled and alive in Palestine.⁷

One commentator, reflecting on this account in Deuteronomy, heralds this "system" of education as highly effective, since, as he observes:

The statutes of God are to be handed down to all generations, not as a mechanical code of dull duty but as instinct with Yahweh's warm concern. The method by which this is to be accomplished could hardly be matched in effectiveness: Each father must respond to his son's search. When the parent's responsibility to practice, exemplify, and share their religion with their children is abandoned neither the church, church school, nor catechetical class can ever fully supply the gap.⁸

The commentary continues:

The moral and spiritual accretions of the race are never passed on automatically. To most men religion comes first by authority and only later is tested by reason and experience.⁹

So the adults in a religious community have a heavy

⁷G. Ernest Wright, (Exegesis) "The Book of Deuteronomy," in Interpreter's Bible (12 vols.), 2:377.

⁸Henry H. Shires and Pierson Parker, (Exposition) "The Book of Deuteronomy," in Interpreter's Bible, *ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

responsibility and high privilege to understand, appropriate, test, own and share the religious heritage which they have received, which sustains and saves them.

What especially interests me here is that rather than confessing a belief in God in abstract terms, the story is told. The whole heritage is shared, not just the gist of what it is all about. The "delivery system," then, by which the Judaic-Christian faith comes to us and is perpetuated appears to rely heavily upon appropriation and sharing of heritage. Faith may begin anew in each new generation (the Church is always just one generation from extinction!) but the rudiments of faith are rooted in history and shared as heritage.

A glimpse of how deep this concept of the role of history and heritage goes in the Old Testament can be caught by looking over Bernhard W. Anderson's shoulder as he surveys the theology of the Yahwist, the writer of portions of the Old Testament stigmatized by the use of the name of God as JHVH OR JHWH. He says:

The Yahwist was not interested primarily in discussing the antecedents of the Exodus in a way that would satisfy modern historians and archaeologists. His purpose was to confess Israel's faith in Yahweh, whose saving deeds had been manifested in Israel's history. With the Exodus as the fulcrum of his historical interpretation, he reworked the traditions now found in the book of Genesis. To the Yahwist the meaning of the Exodus was the meaning of all history, right back to Creation.¹⁰

¹⁰Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp. 207-9.

So the appropriation and interpretation and sharing of heritage is germane even to the very writing of the Bible.

In tracing the Old Testament heritage of faith, J. Phillip Hyatt acknowledged changes and growth in the Old Testament concepts, yet saw a heritage of faith that even now is still relevant, valid and significant. Two keys he sees are:

The Old Testament seeks constantly to set forth the sovereignty of God. The faith of the Old Testament is not man-centered but God-centered. It proclaims the belief that God is sovereign Lord both of nature and of history, and that man finds his right relationship to God when he recognizes him as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. When man fails to acknowledge God as such, he falls into sin and failure.

And:

The second key is the concept of the covenant which God made between himself and Israel. . . . It was an agreement by which Yahweh became the God of the Israelite tribes, and they undertook to be the obedient people of Yahweh. This covenant pervades much of the subsequent history, even when the word itself is not used.¹¹

Anderson declares that the most distinctive feature of the Jewish people is their sense of history. In many respects, he indicates, the Jews have always been diverse--in theology, in culture, and even in racial characteristics. But, he would remind us, Judaism is the religion of a people who have a unique memory which reaches back through the centuries of the stirring events of the

¹¹J. Philip Hyatt, The Heritage of Biblical Faith (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1964), p. 88.

Bible, events that formed them as a people with a sense of identity and vocation. To remind us how crucial a sense of heritage is in Judaism, Anderson recalls that whenever Passover is celebrated or the law is read or parents instruct their children in the tradition, the memory is perpetuated. His conviction that, should historical memory be destroyed, the Jewish community would soon dissolve, is no doubt correct.¹²

In the book of Nehemiah, written to seek to interpret the history of the Jews from a priestly point of view, relating events as a remnant of Jews returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, the heritage of Israel is rehearsed in an effort to reconstitute Israel as an obedient people of God. Beginning with the creation and moving to the call of Abraham, the exodus, the covenant through Moses, the receiving of the promised land as the heritage which gave them a place to stand in history and a reason for confessing their disobedience and rebellion, which was seen as the reason for the earlier demise of Israel, the story unfolded. The God with whom they had to do was the God of "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" whom they as a people had rebelled against, neglecting and repudiating their heritage--thus losing its blessings.

Otto J. Baab speaks clearly, also, of the importance

¹²Anderson, p. 2.

of a sense of heritage to Hebrew religion. He has observed that the most apparent principle contributing to the unity of Old Testament theology, for all its diversity, is that of historical continuity. He described it almost poetically when he wrote:

While changing with the passage of time, yet--like an ever-flowing stream which constantly receives into itself new materials from its shores and bed, but remains fundamentally the same and retains its distinctive features--Hebrew religion through the centuries perpetuated itself as a distinctive way of life and belief. To be sure, it grew and changed under the influence of new environmental conditions and new ¹³ personalities, but its identity never disappeared.

The prophets of Israel spoke forth the "word of Jahweh" to the people in the interest of calling them to accountability in the light of their heritage. As the prophet Jeremiah spoke warning to Israel concerning the perils of disobedience, he made direct reference to their heritage, especially the exodus (Jer. 11:6).

Again and again the word to Israel seems to be a call to review their heritage: Remember--Think--Act!

And the New Testament presents a similar picture for Christians and the Church.

The theology of heritage in the New Testament

There is a continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament not only in that a theology of heritage

¹³Otto J. Baab, The Theology of the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949), p. 251.

is reflected in both, but also in that the latter fulfills the former. For while Christian remembrance focuses especially on the coming of Jesus, the Christ, and most specifically on his life, death and resurrection, the Christ-event is viewed in the Christian community as the fulfillment of the historical drama of Israel set forth in the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament. So, while the Christian faith may be expressed in many forms and the Christian Church is diverse culturally, socially, and theologically, it shares in all its forms and expressions a long and common memory that reaches back through the Christian tradition to those crucial events of which the Bible is the primary record and witness. Anderson is correct in saying that Christians have the historical sense.¹⁴

In the New Testament, then, as in the Old, the sense of identity of the people of God traces itself to an event in which God is seen as initiating the action on behalf of the people. Peter sermonized on it to the audience in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses (Acts 2:23 RSV).

And

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36).

¹⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941), pp. 43-90.

This became the heart of the heritage of the Church, the Christ-event to which the apostles pointed again and again to create community, deepen commitment, and fight heresy. As the letters were written to the churches the people were not exposed to new and strange teachings but reminded of their heritage and exhorted to fully appropriate, cherish and fulfill what they had received.

When Paul the apostle reminded the church at Corinth of the heritage he had passed on to them he pointed directly to the kerygma--the proclamation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was the heart of the heritage. Christians were to begin here to understand who they were, how their relationship to God was established and what was the source of their salvation (I Cor. 15:1-8).

--The power to break down dividing walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile Christians centers there (Eph. 2:14-17).

--The power to make "new creatures" of forgiven sinners reconciled now to God, self and one another centers there (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

--The call to a new life of responsible freedom and the power to live that style centers there (Col. 2:20-3:4).

--Faith to transcend barriers of race, sex or

class centers there (Gal. 3:24-28).

The first letter of Peter even builds a bridge between the Old Testament heritage and that of the New Testament, declaring that the new people of God created through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3) now hold all the titles attributed to holders of the old covenant (1 Peter 2:9-10).

C. Ellis Nelson clearly sees the Bible as a holder of heritage. Among his observations:

The Bible as a book demonstrates in its own composition that it is not primarily a theological book in which we can expect to find an organized account of the Christian faith. Rather, it is a history book that describes, from the standpoint of a people who had faith in God, what that faith meant in the day in which they lived. . . . The New Testament itself makes the promise that God's presence and guidance are in the Christian fellowship. The Bible itself has a curious relationship to the Church; it contains an account of the authentic apostolic tradition, yet the experiencing of the apostolic tradition is normally found only in the living body of believers. The Bible gives the living community the responsibility of interpreting its own history.¹⁵

Nelson helps us understand how the Bible holds and passes along to us a heritage of faith by identifying the meaning of "historical event." He describes it as an event that is still formative for the present or an event that we make formative for the present. He contrasts events that took place in prehistoric England (which may

¹⁵C. Ellis Nelson, Where Faith Begins (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1971), p. 124.

be interesting but have no bearing on our lives, thus not "historical events") with actions of King George III and the British Parliament in relation to the American colonies. These events are a part of our history because those events led to the establishment of American independence, thus, for us, are "historical events." "Just so," he explains, "the stories of Abraham in Genesis are a part of my history and as such help determine my life."¹⁶ A theology of heritage would affirm that all of us who have faith feel this impingement upon us every time we are called to risk, to encounter the unfamiliar, to lay aside our security for the sake of a greater good.

L. Little implies that a theology of heritage was part of the experience of Jesus himself. And we find in his observation a hint of the kind of spirit with which we must view and use heritage. We must take responsibility for it and incorporate it into our thinking and living in a real and vital way, not in a wooden fashion, as if by rote. In short, we must be creative. Of Jesus he observes:

Jesus' outlook on life and his concept of human nature were the result of a skillful blending of tradition and creativity. He was well acquainted with the Jewish scriptures and selected from them elements which constituted the core of his faith. Some elements he rejected, others he expanded until they seemed entirely new.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁷L. Little, pp. 135-36.

To be people of biblical faith--to live out a theology of heritage--we may not appropriate every part of our heritage in a wooden and literal way but we will always start with the primary witnesses to God's revelatory events and listen. Then we will Remember--Think--Act.

A Theology of Heritage--Verified in
Personal Experience

I find in my own interior life as a human being and as a Christian a certain resonance with what we have just observed concerning biblical theology and the theology of heritage implicit within it. And I find that this experience helps me identify with church members who are asking for clarity in their quest to identify and appropriate their religious heritage. I will share here a few of my personal feelings.

Perhaps this project has come to mean so much to me because it says so much about me personally.

I am one who has come late to cherish his own personal heritage. There were years of my life when my theme song was the words of a popular ballad of years ago:

I keep wishing I were somewhere else,
walking down a strange new street,
hearing words that I have never heard
from a one I've yet to meet.

--I was born rural and wanted to be urban.

--I was born poor and wished to be wealthy.

--I was a skinny, ruptured kid and wanted to be strong.

--My parents were super-pious and unsophisticated and I wanted them to be earthy, metropolitan, elite.

--I wanted a bass voice and grew up to sing tenor.

--I wanted to be athletic and have "two left feet."

It was not until well into adult life that I found the glory of my heritage and appropriated it into my self-understanding.

--I remembered seeing the love and patience of God in the face of my father at age 12.

--I saw the "courage to be" of my little less-than-well educated and less-than-psychologically-secure mother.

--I beheld the baptismal certificate recording the Christian baptism of my parents at the time of their marriage.

--I witnessed the celebration of their sixtieth wedding anniversary.

--I heard of my parents' prayers and plans for a son.

Glimpses of my heritage wrought a change in my way of perceiving myself and my family. I rejoiced in life as a fantastic gift and my heritage as part of God's ongoing creativeness. I rejoiced that on my mother's side of our family we had people on the Mayflower and that a clergyman on my father's side broke ice in winter in order to receive

Christian baptism. A realization broke over me. It was that in spite of all the negative things I might see in my family heritage (and myself), God had done some magnificent things. I rejoice to own, participate in, and help perpetuate that.

Those same emotions flow in me as I ponder our religious heritage and realize that our denominational Campbell-Stone-Scott heritage is far from flawless. Yet it has been moved by a magnificent obsession with the possibilities of Christian unity that holds on to an appropriate openness, guards precious freedoms, allows for authentic diversity and proceeds in a rational manner with heartfelt sincerity. It is a heritage to be cherished.

If we are unaware of our heritage or lose touch with it or come to feel that it is inadequate, our first responsibility is to review it and understand it. Only as this is done are we able as a congregation or member of a denomination to say in any meaningful way: "These are our roots. This is our heritage. This journey has brought us to this juncture and this is who we freely choose to be."

A Theology of Heritage--Applicable to Denominational History

God both gives us who we are and calls us to be who we are and will be. Just as God calls us to our personal identity through our history (there is no "me" apart from

my roots and my odyssey), so a congregation of persons is brought together both by the history of the whole Church, its denomination and its congregation. And just as I must be reminded who I am and freely accept myself and affirm my heritage, just so, God in freedom elects to be our God and calls us to be his people. God, in Christ, called the Church into being. Yet we must self-consciously and intentionally choose to be what God has called us to be. To have a clear sense of identity a congregation of persons must be reminded of the historical events and forces that produced them and take, or repudiate, ownership of that heritage and identity.

We enter into fellowship and celebrate the sacraments of the Church in the setting of some community. That community has a history, a heritage and a faith. To be a self-conscious, responsible Christian in our day and time, to have a sense of identity, we do well to have an identification. That sense of identification gives us groundedness, rootedness, and a concrete place of worship, work and service in the real world with our real lives.

While the circumstances by which we come to it may vary, so that each member of a community is part of that group for his or her own reasons, the time must come for each of us when we review and decide "Yes or No." "I am this or I am not." "I identify or I do not." "You can count on my commitment and my commitment is this:." This

is highly important, for as Miller says:

The Church has a total ministry, which includes its educational responsibility; the Church has a body of belief to be communicated; the Church has a relationship to the world; the Church must come alive in the local congregation, for we find the church of Christ through our membership in a church.¹⁸

And it is imperative, if persons are to be integrated into a congregation and denominational structure, that they have some awareness of how history and heritage work and how God uses such to establish and sustain his people. Without this sense, they not only can become confused in their own spiritual quest, they can also be subject to confusion and pain if they fly in the face of the traditions of the group that takes its heritage seriously. Nelson understands and articulates this very clearly. He explains it this way:

To be religious one has to be in a certain tradition. All religions have individuals who are innovators modifying the tradition given to them or reformers who drastically change a belief system; and occasionally a charismatic leader appears who develops a new religion. But in all of these cases the work of the leader is established and maintained by a group of believers who are able to systematize the insights and affirmations of the leader into a historical tradition. However, traditions are not created out of thin air; they are historically rooted in men, movements, and events which, in turn, are historically conditioned.¹⁹

Therefore, just as the Hebrew fathers of old were responsible, under God, to be sensitive to the questions

¹⁸ Randolph Crump Miller, Christian Nurture and the Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 17.

¹⁹ Nelson, p. 68.

of their sons as they began to develop spiritual awareness, and to answer them out of the best of their heritage, so the contemporary church has a responsibility in its program of education to share its heritage in a meaningful way to give the searcher (whether new to the group or an established member coming to a new consciousness) an opportunity for ownership.

Rachel Henderlite holds that the church's responsibility at this point lies in the fact that God apparently has not provided any adequate instrument other than the believing community as a medium for the work of the Holy Spirit. There may be some individuals who consider themselves "struck by lightning while walking through a field" thus having a special kind of one-to-one relationship with God, but Henderlite sees a person exposed to the Holy Spirit as he or she is included in a congregation of believers and lives in the environment of the congregation's own fulness. She traces a newcomer's experience as:

--worshipping with the congregation,

--becoming aware of the presence of God to his people through word and sacrament, prayer and liturgy, hymn and fellowship,

--observing individuals and groups struggling with decisions to be made in areas of responsibility,

--perceiving their faith in the reality and nearness of God,

--witnessing their concern to interpret each situation in the light of Jesus Christ,

--watching decision making and the action that follows decision,

--hearing their prayers for forgiveness as they fall short of grasping the full meaning of God's intention in the situation,

--hearing their prayer for God's transforming grace.

Through this kind of experience a person comes to know, sometimes in subtle ways, that the people in the congregation experience God as the most real factor in their situation and they understand their own behavior to be always contingent upon him and in response to him. Thus, the person is introduced to faith as he participates with these people of faith and is himself drawn into the faith and is on his way to owning such faith himself. It is then, Henderlite claims, that such a person is ready for a school. It is then he has questions to ask that deserve special hearing and response. These are questions she hears in such a person:

How did we get to be this kind of people, when obviously not everyone looks at life in this way? How did we come to know that God is like this? How will I be sure that these people are right about God? How did I happen to be included in their fellowship? What would it mean for me if I were to reject it? How will

I have to act if I accept their convictions?²⁰

When such questions come the person is ready to sit down with his peers and, "together with a wise man or woman of the faith," says Henderlite, "study the origins and meanings of the Christian faith."²¹

It is only a small step from this picture of sharing the more universal heritage of the faith to answering questions about the particular denomination involved and its history and heritage. It was not long ago that questions of that nature were being raised within the congregation of Edmonds Christian Church. In Chapter III I will share those questions and something of our response to them, and in Chapter IV I will share some evaluations of that response and some things I learned from it. At this point I wish simply to say that our response was in keeping with the theology of heritage I am seeking to describe and illustrate in this chapter. For it is my conviction that when such questions arise among the people of God, as in every age, we are called to review our heritage, to Remember--Think--Act.

A Theology of Heritage--Illustrated by
Disciple Authors

I grew up in timber country and it has been my

²⁰Rachel Henderlite, "Asking the Right Questions," in A Colloquy on Christian Education, ed. John H. Westerhoff (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1972), p. 205.

²¹Ibid.

observation that trees with strong and deep root systems can withstand many a storm and continue to grow. This is surely no surprise to the Creator of trees (and persons and churches) who ordained that trees not be tumbling weeds.

So it is not surprising that these recent decades of instability and storm in our society, theology and education would witness a special interest in "roots," whether those of Alex Haley, of you and me, or of our congregation and denomination.

We have found as we have pursued this project that the experience of our congregation going through a period of reassessment is part of a larger picture, as Osborn has described and which we shared in the Introduction to this paper, and as is seen by the writings of Disciples during this period of recent history. Again and again the subject of heritage has surfaced. Some instances of this are worth sharing.

Never dreaming how turbulent they would be, but sensing ourselves to be at some sort of crossroads, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tagged the 1960s in advance the "Decade of Decision." In 1961 Winfred Garrison published his book, Heritage and Destiny, a review of our religious and denominational heritage. In the preface, Perry E. Gresham lauds Garrison for reminding us that our heritage is from "Peter on the day of Pentecost

from the Renaissance and the Reformation, as well as from Stone at Cane Ridge and Campbell at Brush Run" (our renegade Presbyterian founding fathers).²² As our writing to this point has indicated, he could have even traced our heritage back to Abraham or Creation or ultimately to God. His presentation reflects, I believe, the Disciple emphasis on New Testament Christianity.

Gresham made another statement that is still part of our spiritual quest. I understand it as a tribute to the proper implementation of a theology of heritage. If he is correct, we are still in a period of strengthening our roots for any future storm. His intriguing statement is: "There is a strange power which derives from reflection as a prologue to action."²³

We are still counting on that "strange power" to cause us to recapture our sense of mission and move us into the future with greater confidence and increased significance. It did not settle in upon us in the 1960s. The quest continued in the 1970s. As late as 1975, Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker published their larger and more inclusive updated history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) under the title Journey in Faith. They prefaced it by acknowledging:

²²Winfred Garrison, Heritage and Destiny (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1961), p. 6.

²³Ibid.

In the mid-1970's the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is reexamining its heritage and searching for its identity. We hope that this volume will be useful in both the reexamination and in the search.²⁴

Picking up on that theme in a resource book for lay persons published in 1979, Our Christian Church Heritage appeared with the subtitle Journeying in Faith. Its aim appears to be to make a study of Disciple heritage manageable and appealing. In it, Kenneth A. Kuntz of the Division of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) made this statement:

I guess I would say that the future of the Christian Church will be dependent upon its capacity to understand its heritage and to clarify what our real purpose is at this point in history.²⁵

Apparently a lot of people across the denomination were asking questions such as were raised in our congregation to prompt the General Minister and President, Kenneth L. Teegarden, to write his version of our heritage, titling it We Call Ourselves Disciples. He was more concerned to describe where we are now, but the historical element was unavoidable, as he says:

The purpose of this book, then, is to tell what the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is like in the mid-seventies. There will be enough history to provide

²⁴ McAllister and Tucker, p. 11.

²⁵ Kenneth A. Kuntz, "What's Ahead for the Church?", in Our Christian Church Heritage, Journeying in Faith, ed. William L. Sprague and Jane Heaton (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1979), p. 52.

perspective (how we got this way).²⁶

It is a bit prophetic that he started his book with a discussion of the problem of identity and ended it with a look at the future. And as he pointed us toward the ultimate goal of the full unity of all Christians he dipped into a theology of heritage, quoting the statement Osborn made in an article. There, heritage takes its place among many concerns. Osborn wrote:

Disciples need to stress the centrality of Jesus Christ and the significance of confessing him Lord; engage seriously in biblical doctrine and renew our heritage as a people of the Book [emphasis mine]; understand the biblical doctrine of the church and emphasize the meaning of the sacraments in its life; give leadership and support to efforts toward reconciliation among Christians and throughout society; recover an evangelism that communicates the Christian message in convicting terms and draws people to commitment; bear witness to freedom and diversity; and apply "churchly pragmatism" in settling such problems as inequities among minorities, delinquency and crime, development of community, the life of prayer, and witness to outsiders.²⁷

A number of Osborn's concerns are listed as part of our total heritage.

The bottom line to which author after author comes in reviewing our heritage and looking to the possibilities of a significant future is the contribution we have made and may make to ecumenicity and full Christian unity. In this regard two authors have written concisely and recently,

²⁶Kenneth Teegarden, We Call Ourselves Disciples (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), p. 115.

²⁷Ibid.

summing up a theology of heritage from their own points of view. They are both excellent and optimistic.

One is Lester G. McAllister, Jr., writing in the quarterly of my alma mater, Lexington Theological Seminary. On the value of our heritage he declares:

If we emphasize that which is continuous in our history we can take courage. If we are truly concerned for the spiritual hunger of persons, and not "hung up" on techniques and trivia, we can take heart. Disciples in their heritage have several features to offer an ecumenical age, even a secular age, which will strengthen the proclamation of the gospel in America.²⁸

And he proceeds to list these:

(1) Our concept of the centrality of Christ has been a great strength. Our simple confession of faith has been the confession of Peter. We have had no creed but Christ.

(2) Our belief in a revealed religion holding the Scriptures as central and emphasizing the Christianity of the New Testament is a positive good when embraced. He implies that these must be held with an openness of mind.

(3) The concept of the eldership is seen as more than an expediency of the frontier. It is rooted in an understanding of the need for spiritual oversight in the church.

(4) Our witness to the sin of a divided church

²⁸Lester G. McAllister, Jr., "The Disciples and Evangelism," Lexington Theological Quarterly. XIV,1 (January 1979) 3-4.

and Disciple contribution far beyond our numbers to leadership of the ecumenical church.

(5) Our continued witness to believers baptism by immersion, symbolizing the new creature in Christ, and to the spiritual strength of weekly Communion are deemed important. He perceives in Disciple life and celebration a balance between worship and service, between koinonia and diakonia.

"In a technological, sophisticated and jaded age," says McAllister, "we have to seek to recapture to recover and, most of all, to make believable, the ancient truths of the gospel."²⁹

G. Harold Roberts offered the other concise digest of our heritage. On the subject of heritage he, a local pastor, wrote that "Disciples have some insights that are important for the present day."³⁰ And he, too, offered a list of vital things which he considers still speak to the worldwide Christian community in the search for effective evangelism, sound churchmanship and workable church organization. They are similar to those of McAllister, yet different enough to provide further food for thought. He adds to the above categories the Disciple concept of covenant in contrast to a coercive system,

²⁹Ibid., p. 4.

³⁰G. Harold Roberts, "Heritage," Disciple v,18 (September 17, 1978) 9-10.

recognition of various forms of lay ministry, openness to ordination of women and roles of women in church leadership, and a common sense approach to religious life and behavior. And then he takes the words right out of my mouth by writing that, as a Disciple, "I thank God for my heritage and hope that I may be able to help keep it vigorously alive and relevant for these times."³¹

In that spirit I welcomed our church's heritage study.

³¹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER III

OUR REVIEW OF DENOMINATIONAL HERITAGE

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

I have affirmed that a review of heritage was a positive step in the life of our congregation toward re-establishing a sense of identity and moving the church toward self-renewal. My purpose now is to share some substantive aspects of that action so that the reader can judge its merit and so that I can offer my own evaluation of the project in the fourth and concluding chapter. I will offer here, then, in the following order, (1) a brief description of the process which produced a series of seven lectures on Disciple heritage, (2) a summary of the content of the lectures, (3) an indication of their strengths in terms of content, and (4) a critique of the lectures with ways I perceive the series could have been improved.

The Process That Produced a Seven-Lecture Series

Our congregation decided, in the late 1970s, to make a review of the heritage of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) available to the adult constituency in the form of an adult education project. We proceeded in the following way.

A task force, comprised of one-half of the church cabinet, studied our top priority goal for that year. That goal was "to help all adults in the church grow in terms of broadening their horizons, to a deeper understanding of the heritage of their biblical faith." In the process, the word "heritage" gained special attention. An objective was hammered out, on the basis of the interest of the task force, "to involve at least fifty percent of the adult constituency of the congregation in a review of our denominational heritage as a biblical people."

At least three reasons for needing such a review were in evidence: (1) the trauma through which the church had recently passed had left the congregation unsettled with a consequent need for grounding, (2) no adequate program of orientation for new members had been offered as a regular part of the adult education program so that an experience of "catching up" was needed, and (3) people in membership had come from a number of denominational backgrounds and some were asking questions about who the Disciples really are and how they got that way. Thus, the validity of Kenneth L. Teegarden's observation in his book We Call Ourselves Disciples was clear and applicable to our church. He wrote:

We Disciples have beliefs and practices in common with all sorts of Christians. These apparent similarities sometimes are superficial, sometimes fundamental. We baptize by immersion, so we look like Baptists. We have Communion every Sunday, so we look a bit like

Roman Catholics. We stress the ministry of the laity, so we look a little like Quakers. Our congregations call their pastors rather than accepting assigned ministers, so in that respect we look like Presbyterians. We rely heavily on preaching and teaching, so we look somewhat like Methodists. We have congregational government, so we look a lot like the United Church of Christ.¹

He then noted:

This is confusing, especially to persons who spot familiar characteristics as they transfer into the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from other denominations.²

In our small suburban congregation we have members representing all but one of the groups named above plus several more as well.

The preparation of the educational project began with a listening conference with the task force (this writer being the listener) and the framing of a series of questions. The questions, in turn, were set before six leading Disciples in the area. Both clergy and laity were involved in this group. They were asked to serve as guest lecturers on the subject of Disciple history, heritage and faith. Their basic assignment was to respond to these eight questions:

- (1) Who are the Disciples?
- (2) What historical events shaped the Disciples?
- (3) What stance is distinctively Disciple?

¹Kenneth L. Teegarden, We Call Ourselves Disciples (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), p. 11.

²Ibid.

- (4) What has happened to us?
- (5) How have we changed?
- (6) How has our situation changed?
- (7) Where are we now?
- (8) Where do we fit in the mission of the whole Church?

Eight weekly ninety-minute sessions were held. The six lecturers gave a total of seven lectures, with one evening at mid-point in the series devoted to small group discussion. The lecturers did not respond to the eight questions on a rigid one-to-one basis. A sort of chronology, however, was followed. The series did begin with early history and move to a discussion of the contemporary scene, while reflecting on Disciple heritage. The lecturers sought to avoid an inordinate amount of duplication in the material they presented but they were free to move back and forth on the chronological scale, at their discretion, in order to respond to the questions and make, or illustrate, the points of their choosing.

A Summary of the Seven Lectures

Lectures number 1 and 2--Dr. William Phillips

Against the backdrop of early American socio-religious history, Dr. William Phillips described, in the first two lectures, the religious movements on the American frontier at the beginning of the nineteenth century

which converged to form the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He saw reaction against the theologies brought over from Europe (especially Calvinism) and attempts to purify, simplify, and democratize the Church as a continuation of the Protestant Reformation, taking unique form on American soil. Freedom from a state church made it possible for the American frontier to spawn indigenous religious movements emphasizing congregational government and a break with creedalism.

With the aid of a map and a chart, Williams traced three movements which contributed to Disciple history and heritage. These were: (1) the "Christians" who emerged from the Republican Methodist movement, led by James O'Kelly in the South, (2) the western "Christians" led by Barton W. Stone in Kentucky, and (3) the "Disciples" led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania and Ohio. The O'Kelly movement emphasized an equality among clergy, the right of private judgement and strong congregational government. A certain Rice Haggard, active in this movement, was found later to be an influence among the group of "Christians" led by Barton W. Stone in Kentucky. The Stone movement was traced to the early development and work of Barton W. Stone as a Presbyterian minister. The Cane Ridge Revival in which Stone was involved was described, along with Stone's ambivalence concerning the spiritual exercises (falling, jerking, barking, etc.) which were

associated with it. Stone's withdrawal from service as a Presbyterian minister on theological grounds, the formation and subsequent dissolution of the Springfield Presbytery and the adoption of the name "Christian" was related.

Part of the "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery" embodied the desire of Stone's group for the unity of Christians. Stone's vision was of a movement opposing denominationalism, creedalism and provincialism. He believed in Christian unity as a practical program. While Stone was neither wealthy nor an effective organizer, his personality and faith were appealing and contributed to the strength of the "Christians" who followed him.

The theme of unity appeared quickly again as the development of the Campbell movement was traced. Thomas Campbell, born in Northern Ireland and trained in the Church of England, became a minister in the much divided Presbyterian Church. As an Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian he became fully aware and "sick to the death" of the squabbling among religious groups in Northern Ireland. With excellent educational credentials he came to America in 1807 hoping for better things. His experiences as a circuit rider led to a break with the Presbyterians also. Troubling issues were: (1) his insistence on serving the Lord's Supper to members of all branches of the Presbyterian Church, (2) theological disputes

concerning the Westminster Confession, and (3) a vision of breaking away from the division of sects. He formed the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, with three others and wrote the Declaration and Address, in which he called for the unity of Christians by returning to the practice of primitive Christianity as described in the New Testament. The radical emphasis on the Bible was not the problem in the hands of the scholarly and irenic Thomas Campbell it was to become later in the hands of lesser men with exclusivist spirit.

At the arrival of Thomas's eldest son, Alexander, in 1809, the two men found they had come to similar conclusions about the directions the church should take, independently of each other.

Described as brilliant, indefatigable and lucky (he married wealth), Alexander became the leader of the "Reformers." He preferred the name Disciples of Christ. He led the "Reformers" into association with Baptist groups in western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Their common interest in immersion and local autonomy drew the groups together but theological differences and power struggles over the leadership divided them.

The Campbell and Stone movements found that, while they differed in intensity of interest concerning "the Ancient Order of Things," the role of immersion in church membership, the place of ordination, and other issues,

their common interest in unity, liberty and biblical faith was strong enough to forge a lasting union of the two groups in Lexington, Kentucky, 1 January 1832.

The Campbell-Stone Movement grew numerically in a dramatic way in the latter half of the nineteenth century and ended that century as the largest native American religious group, with two million members.

Lecture number 3--Rev. Robert Clarke Brock

Declaring that both statements and deeds reveal one's theology, Brock looked at the main thrusts characterizing early Disciple history and thought. Three points of Disciple theology were identified. They were: (1) belief in the unity of the Church, (2) concern for liberty, and (3) the principle of restoration.

Early Disciples believed that, in the face of the confusion and diversity in the Church, the way to be assured of being part of the Church as to go back to the New Testament, pick out what was done there to enter the Church, and do that. They felt Christians could find the grounds for the unity God intended for the Church that way.

Regarding liberty, the conviction was that, except for express commands of God, every person has the right to work out his or her own relationship to God. The Scripture speaks clearly on some matters. Where Scripture is silent persons have the right to make their own decisions and no

church, body of people, bishops, church boards or group within the church has the right to dictate to them what they shall do where the Scripture is silent.

To reform the Church by restoring the New Testament model would be to include (1) immersion as baptismal form, (2) local autonomy for each congregation, and (3) elders, deacons and deaconesses in the local church. Brock was clear that a critical study of the Bible does not support the idea of a blueprint for the Church in the New Testament. Disagreement concerning this third point has been much of the reason for the fragmentation of the movement. Holding fast to unity moves one in a certain direction while promoting a program of restoration on the idea of a blueprint takes one in quite another direction. The Church of Christ (which does not use instrumental music in worship) which became a separate body in 1906, stresses the blueprint notion. Disciples, stressing the concern for unity, have become more liberal, ecumenical and progressive.

A key turning point in the nineteenth century for Disciples was the year 1849. That year D. S. Burnett called together a meeting of the churches in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the issue of how local congregations related to one another and whether or not the Church could act in concert was raised. This signalled the beginning of movement from the status of a sect to that of a denomination. But the trip took another century or more. At that time

it was pointed out that the conventions and the missionary and Bible societies were not the Church but a society of individuals. It would be 1968 before Disciples would declare and covenant that the Church manifests itself at the local, regional and general levels.

Brock then traced developments in the latter half of the nineteenth century, including the founding of Disciple colleges.

Lecture number 4--Rev. James E. Stockdale

Rev. Stockdale addressed three areas. They were:

(1) the relationship of the birth of the nation to the birth of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), (2) freedom and how that allowed for the Christian Church to be born with a plea for Christian unity, and (3) the relationship between civil authority and responsible religion (a line, not a wall).

Quoting from Sidney Alstrum's volume, A Religious History of the American People, he set forth the Campbell movement as unique on the American scene and Alexander Campbell as the source of that uniqueness.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) reflects principles of the founders of the nation as no other. There was a strong emphasis on the reasonableness of the Christian faith. This may be one of the reasons why, when in 1829 ninety-six delegates were elected to the

Constitutional Convention of Virginia, in the company of James Madison, James Monroe and Chief Justice John Marshall there was one preacher: Alexander Campbell.

Stockdale underscored earlier reference to the unique atmosphere which made our religious movement possible in early America. There was religious intolerance in the thirteen colonies and on the frontier. Civil authority forced toleration upon reluctant churchmen, most of whom finally saw that the only way to get freedom for themselves was to grant it to all. The Disciple movement both drew from and supported the American system whereby civil authority enforced religious liberty.

Stockdale supported Brock's contention that both words and deeds reveal one's theology. Alexander Campbell, while not a radical social activist, both spoke and acted on social issues. He saw the separation of civil authority and religious authority as a line, not a wall. His style said in effect that responsible religion is involved where it must speak out to remind the state that it is not God. He fought for social reform in the re-writing of the Virginia Constitution. Every cause he supported failed at the time. But he was there and planted seeds of change.

The idea that no single church should have sovereign authority is at the heart of the American experience and Disciple thought. Religious freedom must not subvert the

sovereignty of the state and the state must not become idolatrous. Stockdale traced this concept to our heritage in Scripture.

Lecture number 5--Rev. Wesley Veatch

Veatch's lecture was essentially a walk through a six-page outline handout titled "An Overview of Significant Events in Disciple History," tracing events from 1804 to 1974. He called attention to the importance of the growth in theological views and approach to the Bible which has become a part of Disciple heritage. His adoption of George Beazley, Jr.'s outline of Disciple history as it appears in the volume he edited entitled The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) An Interpretative Examination in the Cultural Context provided not only a review of the whole sweep of the history of the Disciple movement but traced the ebb and flow in theology as well. His list of some persons and events influential in the development of Disciple theology helped answer questions like "How have we changed?" and "How has our situation changed?" The outline and list placed in perspective the "common sense" approach of the Campbells to the Bible, limited, of course, to nineteenth century insights. This early heritage was abused by the accent on literalism and legalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But a liberation from legalism came in the twentieth century

with the pragmatism accompanying liberalism and the re-formulation of theology that has marked recent decades and continues at the present time.

Lecture number 6--The Honorable James A. Noe

Judge Noe addressed the last three of the eight questions, "How has our situation changed?", "Where are we now?", and "Where do we fit in the mission of the whole Church?" He discussed the theological review done by the Panel of Scholars in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the work of the Study Committee on Brotherhood Restructure which worked from 1958 to 1960. The Commission on Brotherhood Restructure was appointed by the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) following these activities early in the 1960s. The commission was made up of from 120 to 130 persons representing both laity and clergy, the whole country, and all levels of participation in the church. Guidelines adopted by the Commission reflect a sense of being grounded in Disciple heritage. They read as follows:

(1) Structure will be designed so that the Christian Church in all of its manifestations at all levels reflects its oneness in the unity of the Church.

(2) The Christian Church will follow the principles of representative government.

(3) The Christian Church in its international

manifestations will have representation from local congregations and regions.

(4) The Christian Church will express this unity of purpose and mission through the adoption of resolutions.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) became a denomination in the formal sense with the adoption of the Provisional Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1968. Judge Noe's personal comment on the Disciple situation was as follows:

Now we are still in the process of becoming the Christian Church (we have no pat answers to everything). We have a heritage that is respected. We have a heritage that is cherished. We are working through that kind of understanding, where we've been, to get where we're going in a very orderly process. Through all this one statement has been helpful: "If we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to work in our midst, then we can believe that the Holy Spirit is helping us claim an appropriate identity for what we see as the mission of the Church."³

Noe identified with the view of Kenneth Teegarden expressed in his book, We Call Ourselves Disciples, that the restoration of the New Testament Church is not a matter of following a blueprint but of structuring the Church along the line of New Testament principles, i.e., functional and developmental. As a dynamic movement the Church is free to build structures appropriate to the times and settings of each age. Well thought out, the Provisional Design reflects emphases of special importance, e.g.,

¹James A. Noe, in a lecture delivered at Edmonds Christian Church 20 February, 1977 and recorded by the author.

(1) the voluntary nature of the relationships to one another at the local, regional and general levels, (2) the Christo-centric nature of Disciple theology, and (3) Disciple acceptance of the mission to witness and serve.

Lecture number 7--Dr. Lawrence Pitman

Whether individuals or corporate institutions, we all have a story consisting of things that have occurred through history and come to the present, making us who we are in the world. Re-telling the story brings strength. Certain parallels exist between the story of Kunta Kinte in Alex Haley's Roots and the manner in which the Bible came to us: oral tradition to heritage developing faith and written records. As are other communions, Disciples are heirs of the biblical story and the denomination's story. Each denomination sought to bring correctives of what was thought at the time to be deficiencies of the Church. Disciples sought to bring Christian unity, unity at the Lord's Table, and re-establishment of the New Testament Order of Things (rather naively conceived). Pitman's hope was that a more recent corrective Disciples have tried to add is a return to the New Testament spirit of Jesus expressed in the spirit of acceptance.

Following these reflections, Pitman led the group in a Bible study workshop session to help the group taste of finding how they fit into "all of this" and to

build interest in Bible study opportunities to be offered by the church in a subsequent program.

Strengths of the Lectures

Viewed as a whole the lecture series had many strengths which could be discussed at great length. They were, in general, responsive to the eight questions posed by the task force and did provide a helpful overview of Disciple history and heritage. Some of these features will be touched on in the next chapter. But for my purposes here I will point to particular insights that stood up as important peaks of understanding, affording vantage points for seeing more deeply into Disciple heritage. Among the most significant are those I now describe.

(1) Identification of the American religious movements from which the Disciples emerged as part of the continuation of the Protestant Reformation, as did Phillips and Pitman, is an important insight. This explains why the Disciples are a "mainstream" church and were not content to become an isolated sect on the American religious scene. It further places the concept of the restoration of New Testament Christianity in the context of the desire for reform and unity, thus providing background for a meaningful critique of the restoration principle as a means to those ends.

(2) Tracing the reaction of early Disciples to the

theologies brought over from Europe (especially the predestination views of Calvinism) provides background for understanding why the Disciples were not quick to embrace neo-orthodoxy in the twentieth century. Phillips and Veatch were clear on this.

(3) Seeing spiritual awakenings as a recurring phenomenon, as Phillips did, helps put the Cane Ridge Revival in historical perspective and provides a backdrop against which the relationship of the Disciples to Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism can be meaningfully pursued.

(4) The description of similarities and dissimilarities between the Campbellites and the Stoneites, discussed to some degree by both Phillips and Brock, introduces the issue of diversity as having been a part of the Disciple experience from the beginning. It is important for Disciples to understand that they have always been a diverse group.

(5) Introduction of the notion that the "blueprint" concept of the Church in the New Testament is not supported by contemporary biblical studies, early in the lecture series by Brock, and later supported by Veatch and Noe, helped establish this important point in the minds of the learners. This was much better than covering it only once late in the series.

(6) Phillips and Stockdale clearly established how deeply the Disciple tradition is rooted in American soil and how basic the principle of reasonableness is to both the nation's founders and the Disciple mindset. This provides background for Disciple self-understanding as a body of Christians who may seem conservative to some sister communions and liberal to others in terms of social action, but who have the positive strength of not being too radical to get a hearing either of civil authorities or the rank-and-file of citizens when addressing social concerns. Like Alexander Campbell, Disciples may be those who plant seeds of change rather than drop bombshells of revolution.

(7) The adoption of Beazley's outline of periods of Disciple history by Veatch for lecture number 5 had the value of providing a review of earlier presentations, a concise presentation of the pragmatic approach of liberalism and the growth in biblical studies that impacted the Disciples in the first half of the twentieth century, while anticipating the changes to come in the last two decades. The strength of review and bridge-building between periods overshadowed the seemingly negative aspect of redundancy. I support his choice of material.

(8) The three theological concerns which Brock identified as heritage from the early Disciple period were in evidence as Noe described the principles and processes

of denominational restructure. The elements of unity, liberty and restoration are clearly there, viewed in the light of Disciple experience and contemporary understanding of what it means to be the Church. This gives high credibility to Noe's personal assertion that Disciples have a heritage that is respected and cherished.

(9) The lectures tell the story of unfolding changes among the Disciples from the beginning until now. Tracing the reaction against Calvinism to the development of early Disciple theology, on to the crystallizing of Disciple thought in the late nineteenth century, followed by the influence of a liberal reformulation in the twentieth century and a new application of Disciple heritage to Church organization, clearly shows the Disciples to be no strangers to change. This inspires faith that Disciples should now prove equal to the challenges of current and future change.

(10) Pitman's reference to Disciple motivation and hope to bring correctives into the life of the Church presents the reforming aspect of Disciple heritage as a continuing concern, not a static, legalistic duplication of patterns.

Areas in Which the Lectures Could Be Strengthened

Points of weakness in the lecture series are encountered where we are brought up before a question, issue

or idea and then are left without follow-through so that a vulnerability to inappropriate inference or inadequate conclusion is created. Or, the groundwork is done for the making of an important point or introduction of a body of information and then the point is overlooked or the information withheld. Material such as will be suggested here would seem to be of higher priority than some of the material that was included.⁴ There follows below some of the areas that fit the above description.

Regarding the element of change

Lectures numbers 1 and 2 by Phillips and number 4 by Stockdale make clear the changing social and religious scene on the American frontier in which the religious movement which produced the Disciples emerged. With broad strokes the portrait is painted of the strong emphasis on rationalism pervading the culture with the attending reality of loneliness on the frontier creating a spiritual hunger which the Second Great Awakening⁵ appeared to address.

⁴This writer's view is that wrestling with basic principles involved in Disciple heritage should have priority over much narrative material and personal asides and that making such adjustments in the structure of some of the lectures combined with a few more handout sheets could have strengthened the lecture series considerably.

⁵The wave of interest in religion that swept across the American frontier at the turn of the nineteenth century, with which the Cane Ridge Revival (Cane Ridge, Kentucky) is associated.

Phillips gave evidence of real feeling for the First and Second Great Awakenings⁶ and indicated that historians will probably date the Third Great Awakening in the third quarter of the twentieth century. That is a keen and important insight. But the lectures stopped short of saying what David Ray Cartwright said this way:

We are once more in the midst of a scientific rationalism on the one hand and a wild religious emotionalism on the other. Since we Disciples were born in this context, we should be well equipped to minister to this situation.⁷

While Disciples may not experience themselves so equipped, Cartwright's insight is encouraging for a church concerned with responding creatively to change and checking out its heritage.

In connection with this, brief attention could be given, with profit, to the parallel drawn by George Beazley between the identity of the United States as a nation and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a religious body. He declared that just as the United States was conceived "in rebellion to oppression" and was born in

⁶The emphasis on rationalism present in the early American experience was a legacy of the Enlightenment. But rationalism alone, then as now, did not speak to the felt needs of everyone. And it is not uncommon, following war and in the face of materialism, for spiritual hunger to surface.

⁷David Ray Cartwright, "Have We Neglected a Part of Our 'Plea'?", in Our Christian Church Heritage Journeying in Faith, ed. William L. Sprague and Jane Heaton (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1979), p. 12.

revolution to grow up on the frontier, and is now trying to adjust to a position of leadership among nations, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), too, was "conceived in rebellion, was born in revolution, grew up on the frontier." It is also in the process of adjusting to a leadership role.⁸ Disciples hold leadership positions in the National Council and World Council of Churches and have influence beyond their proportion in numbers in the ecumenical movement.⁹

The fact that the Disciples are distinctively "an American religious movement"¹⁰ which emerged in a situation paralleled in only two other places in history (Canada and Australia¹¹) makes a critical and creative appropriation of their heritage vital to their ability to be a creative element in world culture and in the Church-at-large through their participation in the ecumenical movement.¹² The lecture series pointed us in the direction of these insights. They deserve to be spelled out clearly.

⁸George G. Beazley, Jr., "Who Are the Disciples?", in his The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1973), pp. 5-6.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Winfred Ernest Garrison, An American Religious Movement (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1945), (passim).

¹¹Beazley, p. 7.

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

Influences shaping the theological orientation
of Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott

The story of the coming of Thomas Campbell to America, breaking with the Presbyterians, writing the Declaration and Address and then being joined by his eldest son, Alexander, to find out that, at the same time, independently of one another, they had embraced the sentiments expressed in the Declaration and Address, leaves to conjecture, if the lecture series alone informs us, how this occurred.

Almost every Disciple historian we read is quick to tell of the theological orientation Alexander Campbell received during the year preceding his migration to America. The year 1808-9 was spent at the University of Glasgow where he came under the influence of Greville Ewing and his associates who were in charge of a training school for lay preachers led and financed by James and Robert Haldane. Young Alexander Campbell was apparently deeply impressed by the outlook of this movement that stressed the promotion of pure and simple evangelical Christianity with a strong restorationist flavor.¹³ Thomas Campbell was no stranger to these influences.¹⁴

¹³Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948), p. 142.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 128.

It is well to note, also, that Walter Scott, the evangelist who sought to restore the "Ancient Gospel" even as Alexander Campbell sought to restore the "Ancient Order of Things," drank from the same theological well.¹⁵

It is important for present-day Disciples to know that these elements in their heritage did not simply come "out of the air" but have traceable, historical roots.

The critique of the restoration principle

At several points in the lecture series elements of a critique of the restoration principle were offered. These especially appeared at the end of the second lecture by Phillips and the third lecture, given by Brock. Both men viewed the restoration concept as problematical. Phillips was clear that the elements of restorationism in the Declaration and Address appeared creative in the hands of a man of intellectual, moral and spiritual stature such as Thomas Campbell, but were subject to abuse in the hands of lesser men. Brock, in turn, indicated that the tension between an emphasis on restoration and a desire for unity is ever with us. Both insights are valid and important.

While the lectures did cast a shadow on the restoration principle, no thorough and adequate critique of it was offered beyond the suggestion that it lends itself

¹⁵Ibid., p. 180.

to narrowness and intolerance when applied legalistically.

A digest of Ralph Wilburn's critique of the restoration principle, as offered on behalf of the Panel of Scholars,¹⁶ would have added great clarity and weight to the lectures. While both the Panel of Scholars and the growth of biblical criticism received attention in the course of the lectures, it did not come through clearly and concisely exactly what changes have impacted our view of the restoration aspect of Disciple heritage.

In fairness, Wilburn acknowledged that weaknesses in the restorationist posture of the Disciple fathers are easier to see from our vantage point in the twentieth century than would have been possible in the nineteenth century. He lists three intellectual developments of the last hundred years exposing errors in the restoration plea as: (1) the scientific development of biblical criticism, (2) a new understanding of the historical character of human existence, and (3) the theological growth of ecumenicity.¹⁷ In the light of these developments he sees fundamental errors in the Disciple restoration plea. He lists them as follows:

¹⁶Ralph G. Wilburn, "A Critique of the Restoration Principle," in The Reformation of Tradition, ed. Ronald E. Osborn (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963), p. 2.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 219.

(1) A false presupposition of the orthodox view of the Bible, and especially the New Testament, viewed as a body of infallible objective truths, anchored in the "facts" of the gospel.¹⁸

(2) The failure to deal critically with the problem of biblical interpretation, unaware that they interpreted the New Testament writings in a manner determined by their historical and cultural situation on the American frontier.¹⁹

(3) Inadequate awareness of the historical character of the Church led to the fallacious assumption that a fixed pattern, essential to the well-being of the Church, is laid down in the New Testament and perfectly exemplified by the apostolic church.²⁰

(4) The separatist attitudes of sectarianism, the founding fathers not being in touch with the reality that the idea of restoring the primitive church was not connected, in their own background, to a desire for unity.²¹

(5) A neglect of theology resulting from the demand for liberty coupled with the emphasis on non-creedalism which, in turn, set the movement up to fall prey to "the vagaries of naive biblicism or the theological anemia of pietism."²²

¹⁸Ibid., p. 226. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 227. ²⁰Ibid., p. 229.

²¹Ibid., p. 230. ²²Ibid., pp. 232-34.

Wilburn's analysis is supported by the observations of other scholars both within and outside the Disciple tradition. In tracing the Varieties of Protestantism in his book so named, John B. Cobb, Jr. contrasted the biblicist with the experientialist, noting that the biblicist approach to Christian faith understands the Christian life primarily as one of belief and obedience. The mind assents to the truths of Scripture and actions must conform to its teaching in order for salvation to be assured. But Christianity is seen as a matter of the heart even more than of the head and hand by the experientialist, who insists that Christian faith must be felt as well as believed. Cobb saw biblicism as resulting in a more static, rigid concept of Christianity which is subject to division over controversies.²³ His observation concerning Disciples and biblicism is:

Most obviously and in most extreme form it has determined the life of the Christian and Disciple groups which sprang from the work of Alexander Campbell and his associates.²⁴

Charles Clayton Morrison, in his book concerning Disciples, The Unfinished Reformation, writing of his own heritage, acknowledged that the early Disciples did come to think of the restoration movement as "a break with the

²³John B. Cobb, Jr., Varieties of Protestantism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 114-15.

²⁴Ibid., p. 116.

historical Church and a junction with the true church of the New Testament, which was lost in the Medieval darkness of Romanist domination."²⁵ That kind of thinking did, as Wilburn observed, blunt the ecumenical impulse of the Disciple movement.²⁶

This kind of weakness in the Disciple religious platform was the farthest thing from Thomas Campbell's mind or intention in the beginning. It was he who called attention to the "heinous nature and pernicious tendency of religious controversy among Christians." He was himself "tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit," and desired not only to be "at rest" but to "adopt and recommend such measures as would give rest to our bretheren throughout all the churches."²⁷

The need for a revised formula of disciple theology

In the interest of brevity it is possible to make one statement of the early theological formula and then move on. This appears to have occurred in the lecture series. As a result, more is needed than a critique of the restoration principle. Other formulas are helpful and worthy of examination. For the relationships between

²⁵Charles Clayton Morrison, The Unfinished Reformation (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 136.

²⁶Wilburn, p. 223.

²⁷Thomas Campbell, Declaration and Address (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1955), p. 24.

various elements in one's heritage are as important as the elements themselves.

Garrison was one who saw deficiencies in tracing the Disciple heritage as primarily the desire for the unity of the Church and the restoration of primitive faith and practice, with Disciple thought determined by the tension and interplay between these two objectives.²⁸ He wrote the formula as follows:

1. The fundamental purpose of the originators and shapers of this movement was the conversion of the world to Christ, and the saving of souls and the enrichment of life by his gospel. This, to be sure, was the aim of all Christian communions; but that which is common to all must not be overlooked. The assets of a religious movement cannot be fully stated in terms of what is distinctive about it.
2. That only a united church could save the world was a thrilling and decisive discovery. The excitement and dynamic of that discovery rings through almost every paragraph of Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address, through the editorial writing of Barton W. Stone, and through the writings of Alexander Campbell for forty years. It is a thesis frequently repeated and amplified by hundreds of Disciple preachers and writers.
3. Two factors were found to be essential to the achievement of unity:
 - a. The restoration of
 - 1) the simple original terms of Christian fellowship and,
 - 2) whatever was prescribed by divine authority in regard to the structure and operations of the church;
 - b. Liberty of private opinion and church practice in all matters upon which there had been no pronouncement by divine authority.²⁹

²⁸Winfred E. Garrison, Christian Unity and Disciples of Christ (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1955), p. 6.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Garrison traces the basis of this formula all the way back to Alexander Campbell, who did indeed write in The Christian System as follows:

Nothing is essential to the conversion of the world but the union and co-operation of Christians.

Nothing is essential to the union of Christians but the apostles' teaching and testimony.³⁰

A formula such as this has the strength of seeing neither unity nor restoration as ends in themselves but as means to an end greater than either or both of them. It also places the element of liberty in perspective so as to encourage its thoughtful and responsible use.

The British theologian, William Robinson, was the author of another classical summary of the Disciple plea which tempers the tension between restoration and unity. His formula, also, had three parts. They were:

- (1) A passion for unity
- (2) The desire for the restoration of the New Testament Church
- (3) The protest against religious sectarianism.³¹

Reflecting on these, Cartwright has observed that the first two aspects have received much attention but that

³⁰Alexander Campbell, The Christian System (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, n.d.), p. 114.

³¹William Robinson, What the Churches of Christ Stand For (Birmingham, Eng.: Church of Christ Publishing Committee, 1928), pp. 12-24.

it is the third point that needs major emphasis at this point in Disciple history.³²

Cartwright agrees with Wilburn that "the restoration method not only did not affect the goal of unity but has served . . . to perpetuate further the disunity of God's people."³³

Along with Morrison,³⁴ Cartwright has recognized "another strand of feeling" which he labels the "liberal" strand present in Disciple heritage along with the emphasis on restoring the New Testament Church.³⁵ He is convinced that the "liberal" strand has been an authentic, legitimate emphasis all through Disciple history, not just initiated in the "Golden Age" of Disciple thought associated with men like C. C. Morrison, E. S. Ames, H. L. Willet, W. T. Moore and F. D. Kershner. He finds both the restorationist and the "other strand of feeling" embodied in Alexander Campbell's own personal approach to the Christian faith, even as Garrison understood him. He explains this as due to the fact that Campbell was both a biblical scholar and a Lockean philosopher.

On the basis of these observations, Cartwright sees Disciples as standing in a good position to present an alternative to sectarianism and finds in Disciple

³²Cartwright, p. 12.

³³Wilburn, pp. 230-31.

³⁴Morrison, p. 153.

³⁵Cartwright, p. 12.

heritage resources "which can be drawn upon to meet the present cultural and religious situation." Further, he sees the Disciple heritage as offering more than just a struggle between the restoration ideal and the desire for Christian unity. For, if this should fail as the unique mission of the Disciples, he sees a mission to fight against sectarianism and to present an alternative to the world. "To every religious group that identifies its will with God's will," he declares, "the Disciples still have the responsibility of lifting up a 'still more excellent way.'"³⁶

This kind of thinking about Disciple heritage puts handles on it which enable us to lay hold on it with a hopeful spirit. Cartwright's personal statement of hope is worth holding before students of Disciple heritage. It reads as follows:

What I hope the Disciples of Christ stand for today is what they have always stood for: not so much to restore the past and preserve it by duplicating it, but to remember a past so that a new future can be open for all who would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God today.³⁷

Armed with similar insight and spirit, Alfred T. DeGroot turned to re-examine the restoration principle and raised the question, "What should be restored?"³⁸ His

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 14.

³⁸Alfred T. DeGroot, The Restoration Principle (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1960), p. 169.

six answers should be set before any serious student of Disciple heritage. They affirm:

1. The vision of ends, or aims, or purposes rather than any deification or ossification of means to those ends must be our first restoration objective.³⁹
2. To affirm and cultivate and enlarge the unity that already exists in the family of Christian people.⁴⁰
3. The modern restoration will be the recapture of the optimism and expectancy of the primitive Christian Church.⁴¹
4. The grand concept of freedom is the overarching ideal under which this divine-human enterprise is to be realized.⁴²
5. What the qualified judgement of sincere Christians can agree is essential to worship and life.⁴³
6. We must recapture a conquering spiritual life.⁴⁴

This kind of information, in lieu of tracing the parallel history of the development of Mormonism and details concerning the founding of Disciple colleges, would have strengthened the lecture series, in my judgement.

The need for a description of the Disciple mind

At several points in the lecture series the need for an adequate mind-set, in order to appropriate and live out the principles set forth in Disciple heritage, came into view. Allusion was made to the problems ensuing from the Declaration and Address falling into the hands of

³⁹Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 175.

⁴³Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 172.

⁴²Ibid., p. 178.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 184.

"lesser men" than Thomas Campbell and to the problem of seeking to contain Disciple heritage in "too small a box." But nowhere in the series was a description of an adequate mentality, or the mentality characterizing Disciples at their best, made clear. For this we must turn to W. Barnett Blakemore and Ronald Osborn.

Blakemore, writing for the Panel of Scholars, described the "Mind of the Disciples" with three terms: reasonable, empirical, pragmatic.⁴⁵

In his recent book on basic beliefs of Disciples of Christ, The Faith We Affirm, Osborn picked up Blakemore's analysis and broadened it to include "ecumenical" and "biblical."⁴⁶

The "Disciple mind" is an important part of the heritage of Disciples. A look at what the aforementioned words mean to these two men is of value.

Reasonable.--Disciples have traditionally steered a middle road between mysticism on the one hand and rationalism on the other,⁴⁷ taking pride in advocating a common sense religion.⁴⁸ Our early leaders sought an understanding

⁴⁵W. Barnett Blakemore, "Reasonable, Empirical, Pragmatic The Mind of Disciples of Christ," in Osborn, The Reformation of Tradition, pp. 161-83.

⁴⁶Ronald E. Osborn, The Faith We Affirm (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1979), p. 14.

⁴⁷Blakemore, p. 162.

⁴⁸Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, p. 16.

of faith that could be explained to ordinary folks and could be embraced with the intelligence as well as with the heart. Osborn takes the position that the claims of religion ought to be examined with rational minds, and this without eliminating mystery from life or faith.⁴⁹

Ideally, Osborn calls us to a healthy kind of tension in which preachers teach people to have faith and, at the same time, to raise questions about the faith they affirm. Faith here is conceived as both (1) personal trust in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, and (2) faith as a body of beliefs, confessed out of intellectual conviction, based on scriptural evidence.⁵⁰ This accent on reasonableness traces all the way back to the set rules for a reasonable interpretation of the Bible which Alexander Campbell wrote into the second chapter of his book, Christian System, even if they were not original with him.⁵¹

Empirical.--While Disciples do not always agree regarding the data appropriate to religious discussion, they do seem to have a common mind as to method. Disciples have quite consistently declared for the validity of the inductive method.⁵²

Osborn states it succinctly that the Disciple mind "reads the Bible reasonably in the light of modern

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁵²Blakemore, p. 165.

secular knowledge, embracing as pertinent all the empirical studies."⁵³ He includes astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, biology, psychology, geography, archaeology, anthropology, sociology and history. "Dialogue between the world of the Bible and the contemporary world is necessary," he says.⁵⁴ Consistent with Lockean philosophy the Disciple mind is strong on the idea that knowledge comes through sense perception even in religion. Osborn acknowledges that Alexander Campbell may have oversimplified and overrationalized⁵⁵ and Wilburn would protest that "there is no presuppositionless study of the Bible."⁵⁶ But the empirical commitment of Campbell is clear and Wilburn acknowledges that "a sincere study of the Bible, in faith, will modify one's presuppositions."⁵⁷ Disciples did and do affirm that religious assurance is not a matter of feeling but acceptance of testimony. And this explains both a point of contention of early Disciples with Baptists and most contemporary Disciples with charismatics. Osborn probably makes a representative Disciple statement when he declares, "the highest form of spiritual experience offered by Christian faith is positive and objective, rather than mystical and charismatic."⁵⁸

⁵³Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, p. 18.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 19. ⁵⁵Ibid. ⁵⁶Wilburn, p. 244.

⁵⁷Ibid. ⁵⁸Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, p. 19.

Continuing to study the Bible empirically, the Disciple mind can be changed. Because some of the assumptions of early leaders have since proved false, present-day Disciples may reject portions of their early heritage, e.g., they no longer see the New Testament as a divinely given constitution for the Church reflecting uniformity in faith and practice.

Pragmatic.--At their origins, Disciples were asserting, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." Whether the slogan was original with Thomas Campbell is open to question.⁵⁹ Their experience of reality did not square with the slogan. Blakemore was correct when he suggested that early Disciples could better have said "Where the Scriptures speak, we don't have to speak because God has; where the Bible is silent, we have to speak because God has not." For Thomas and Alexander Campbell discovered the law of expediency.⁶⁰ Osborn readily identifies with the principles involved here. The Disciple way is seen as learning from experience, putting beliefs to practical test in life.⁶¹ (In his lectures, James Noe appears to see the Provisional Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a natural and proper outcome of the

⁵⁹Blakemore, p. 174.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, p. 20.

application of this principle and the effective working of the Disciple mind.)

Ecumenical.--Osborn states the Disciple intention simply as "to read the biblical message in the light of the common judgement of the whole Christian community for the sake of the whole Church, remembering that (1) the Scriptures were canonized by the larger Church and (2) we need to listen to the best minds in all the churches across the centuries in regard to the meaning of Scripture."⁶²

And this perspective has led Osborn to add a clarifying category to Blakemore's outline of the Disciple mind: one which Blakemore fully understood and would have readily endorsed, along with the ecumenical aspect. Disciples are involved in a dynamic dialogue with the Scriptures.⁶³ We will trace it briefly here.

Biblical.--When Osborn applies the term "biblical" to Disciples he is not talking about holding identical views in every generation either as to the nature or interpretation of the Bible. He correctly acknowledges that the intense biblical scholarship which has grown concurrently with Disciple history has added new and important insights which draw the current generation of Disciples to conclusions which do not always agree with those of earlier

⁶²Ibid., p. 21.

⁶³Ibid., p. 22.

generations. He understands the matter of faithfulness to the Disciple mind as biblical, then, fulfilled by taking the Bible seriously, reading it in the light of contemporary knowledge, and reflecting on its message for the present situation facing Disciples. The Disciple mind, as biblical, receives "the light of Scripture"⁶⁴ by an informed, open and ecumenical approach to the Bible, not by means of rubber-stamping Disciple thought at any one point.

The point Osborn makes here is one of the most important things for Disciple church members to understand as they seek to appropriate and build upon their heritage. The lecture series would have been strengthened by the inclusion of the above profile of the Disciple mind.

The area of the cultural context

In the fifth lecture, seeking to respond to the questions "How have we changed?" and "How has our situation changed?", Wesley Veatch adopted for his handout and oral presentation the outline of Disciple history by periods as structured by Beazley, from the book he edited entitled The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): An Interpretative Examination in the Cultural Context.⁶⁵ This was

⁶⁴From the Preamble of the Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), cf. Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, p. 9.

⁶⁵This is an especially helpful volume, not only because of the unique chronological outline Beazle offers

an excellent choice because it placed before the study group in one session the changes that have taken place as the Disciple movement has unfolded from its beginnings to the 1970s. The periods were identified as:

- (1) the Creative Beginnings (1804-66),
- (2) Disciple Scholasticism (1866-1917),
- (3) the Pragmatic Approach to Liberalism (1917-57), and
- (4) Recovering Authority and the Revolt Against All Authority (1957-72).⁶⁶

This lecture, just past mid-point in the series, thus reviewed the period that had been discussed in the first three lectures, dealt with the scholastic period before the turn of the twentieth century to which we had been but introduced in the earlier lectures, and anticipated the details to be added concerning the contemporary appropriation and investment of our heritage.

That strength could have been positively enhanced by exploiting further the material from Beazley that helps

but because it offers a critical and analytical history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) which gives us a focus on Disciple heritage in the light of the changes taking place in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The authors whose articles are included in the book are good minds in the denomination and the book was edited and prepared to interpret Disciple heritage to Christians of another culture. Beazley was especially sensitive to the relationship of the Church to culture and speaks meaningfully to this aspect of our heritage.

⁶⁶Beazley, pp. 19-57.

Disciples understand themselves in the cultural context, and to see illustrated in Disciple history both the perils of neglecting and the power of exercising the "Disciple mind" we have discussed earlier.

If we review the Creative Beginnings with Beazley he points out that, while Disciple beginnings took place on the frontier, Disciple progenitors were not uncultured men. "The originators of the movement," he observed, were "sensitive to the world thought--their theology was related to the best philosophical thought which they knew."⁶⁷ Inspired by the American dream as participants in a developing nation that drew heavily upon Lockean philosophy for its ideals as did their indigenous religious movement,⁶⁸ they were able to be at home with their culture but yet critical of it⁶⁹ as characterized by Alexander Campbell's participation on the Constitutional Convention of Virginia.⁷⁰ The tendency of Disciples to be middle-of-the-road when it comes to confrontation with culture began there in the roots of Disciple heritage.

In the Scholastic Period, Beazley reports, "the Disciples lost their orientation in world culture and the poise that goes with it."⁷¹ Many Disciple ministers may have been weak in their cultural orientation,⁷² and in the

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 392.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 395.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 393.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 28.

⁷²Ibid., p. 393.

early part of this period many views expressed by Disciple leaders were, in his view, ignorant and contemptuous of the larger world.⁷³

A swing of the pendulum and perhaps an overreaction can be viewed as he moves to the third period, marked by the Pragmatic Approach of Liberalism. Here Beazley sees the Disciples liberated from provincialism, in touch with both biblical and historical sources that had brought in a new era, and enabled to enter into ecumenical participation with an awareness of the common heritage shared among all Christians. Yet this came at the cost of becoming less theological in their thinking and, with other American Church bodies, becoming subject to greater and greater acculturation.⁷⁴ It was precisely at the end of this period that Wilburn warned that without theological renewal the Disciple movement might degenerate into just another expression of culture,⁷⁵ supporting the accuracy of Beazley's assessment of the situation.

In the fourth period, of Recovering Authority and the Revolt Against All Authority, Beazley finds the middle-of-the-road stance holding the main body of Disciples in that, while some Disciples did move left of center, most are found "not far from where their heritage began in the

⁷³Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁷⁵Wilburn, p. 250.

relation of gospel and culture."⁷⁶

As Beazley looked to the future from early in the 1970s before his death, he saw the problem of the Disciples being regarded as conservative by some sister churches⁷⁷ perhaps balanced out by the fact that Disciple insistence on reform rather than radical social and cultural change may equip them to swing the American public better than some of the sister churches.⁷⁸

If Disciples are to appropriate their heritage in the cultural context with a healthy degree of objectivity and be enabled to be intentional about how to invest their heritage in the future, these insights are too important to be passed over. In the lecture they should have held priority over an inordinate amount of personal asides. And they would have reinforced the affirmation of the fourth lecture, that the church is separated from the state by a line, not a wall, in the American cultural situation.

The need for a focus on the future

The last two lectures dealt with the Disciples' current situation in a helpful way, illustrating especially positive developments in two of the areas for which we have suggested further clarification in this chapter.

⁷⁶Beazley, pp. 52 and 398.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 395.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 395 and 398.

I speak of restoration and the Disciple mind.

The adoption of the Provisional Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as described in the sixth lecture, was a matter of the restoration principle being properly appropriated and applied by the Disciple mind to the issue of structure. Consistent with twentieth century biblical scholarship, the early Church is seen as a dynamic movement which revised its structures as necessary to better express its nature and carry out its mission. The biblical understanding of organization as functional and developmental is that which is restored. As a result, the religious movement which abandoned structures in the early part of the nineteenth century for the cause of unity created structures in the last half of the twentieth century to function as a responsible denomination among the denominations searching for unity. With Noe, I can laud this action and see it supported by the views of Wilburn, Beazley, Osborn, DeGroot, et al.

In the closing lecture, Lawrence Pitman raised into view a second issue with which the Disciple mind is appropriately applying the restoration principle, i.e., the issue of tolerance in relationships, by returning to the New Testament spirit of Jesus expressed in the spirit of acceptance. Again we are able to identify with this desire to see the Church applying its heritage in a dynamic and creative way in the face of the many ways discrimination

stifles human life in institutional as well as personally embraced racism, sexism, secularism and materialism.

But the lecture series ended with hardly more than a salutatory reference to the future. And while it is true that the word "future" does not appear directly in any of the eight questions posed by the lecturers, authors on the subject of Disciple heritage appear to see it as part of the package.⁷⁹ We will deal with this area of concern a little further in the chapter to follow. Suffice it to say here that even a paragraph or two helping the hearers to adjust their sights on the future with a better grasp of their Disciple heritage would have been much in order and well received.

⁷⁹Teegarden, pp. 114-16; cf. Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, Journey in Faith (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), pp. 458-59 and James C. Suggs, ed., This We Believe (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1977), pp. 99-102.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATIONS AND LEARNINGS

Facing a Devil's Advocate on the Issue
of Motivation for Having the Lecture
Series on Disciple Heritage

A review of heritage such as we have reported on in Chapter III may, from a sociological viewpoint, be seen as little more than a nostalgia trip at best or an escape into the past at worst. To test our motivation for having the lecture series the observations of Amitai Etzioni serve us well in the Devil's advocate role.

Amitai Etzioni is a professor of sociology at Columbia University, Director of the Center for Policy Research, and a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. In an article published in July 22, 1979 issue of PARADE, a Sunday supplement magazine included with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, he suggested an epitaph for the decade as the "rehashing 70's." Seeing the 1970s as a decade preoccupied with the past, in America, he made an observation. "The earmark of the 70's," he declared "is a prettied-up, nostalgic turning back to selected attractions of past decades."¹

¹Amitai Etzioni, "Special Memories We Call the '70's," PARADE The Sunday Newspaper Magazine (July 22, 1979) p. 6.

One cannot argue with the accuracy of his observations in the secular sphere. The movies "Grease" and "American Graffiti" and the television shows "Happy Days" and "Laverne and Shirley" have had a popularity that cannot be denied. And all of this, given a cursory look, seems innocuous enough. There is, after all, money in mementoes.

Etzioni comes closer to striking a nerve that brings pain to the Church when he identifies the 1970s with the search for roots, for family chronicles, the flood of Americans of all races digging up their pasts à la "Roots."² This quest was not so much for historical accuracy, in his view, as for positive self-identification and identity, derived from selectively calling up the past.

From his perspective as a sociologist, Etzioni saw this trend described above as fitting in well with the society of the 1970s which he saw as "less interested in achievement, progress and 'making it,' and more preoccupied with rediscovering a compelling sense of value."³

The threat that we will hear our own name being called grows stronger when we find that Etzioni cited Robert Brustein's assessment of the 1970s to support his view. Brustein, director of Harvard's Loeb Drama Center, referred to the 1970s as a "retread culture" and saw it as

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

a "form of parasite, living off a parent body of past achievement."⁴ Brustein laments audiences of the 1970s as having sought the "coziness of the familiar" as if they wished to "escape from contemporary difficulties into the more reassuring territory of the habitual and the known."⁵

Etzioni surveyed the events of the 1970s and concluded that Americans lost their optimism, their trust in government--and in most other institutions. One source of solace remained--the past! As he put it, the mood of Americans in the 1970s was: "The present is uninviting, the future uncertain. Long live the past."⁶

Beazley, describing the American scene for the German series, "Die Kiechen der Welt," supported this assessment early in the 1970s when he wrote:

The 1960's have been a hard period for America. The decade has been one of violence, disillusionment and polarization. While the nineteen-seventies have been less hectic, the quiet seems to be one of despair and exhaustion rather than one of the peace of finding solid goals and pragmatic means on which the nation can depend with confidence.⁷

We cannot help but ask whether or not the Church, indeed Edmonds Christian Church, did not fall right in with the culture. Is the study of heritage just a part of the "retread culture" of the 1970s? Is all of our theologizing a way of rationalizing a failure of nerve?

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 7.

⁷George G. Beazley, Jr., "A Look at the Future of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in his The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1973), p. 317.

We must acknowledge that this is possible. It will require no amazing burst of insight to own the reality that if the Disciples in general and Edmonds Christian Church in particular had been in the midst of a mighty creative thrust, and a burst of new growth, there would have been little time or energy to spend looking back.

In honesty, I want to own the reality that a part of the motivation for a review of our Disciple heritage in Edmonds Christian Church was a participation in the cultural currents of the 1970s. There is an element of re-digging the mines of the past to provide fuel for the present sense of identity and mission.

It is honest, as well, to declare that not all the motivation for the review of heritage rooted in the mentality of the 1970s and that even that part which did was not necessarily all negative as a result.

The people of God, both individually and corporately, have required a period of adjustment following a stressful event all the way back to Bible times. Israel wandered in the wilderness between their slave days in Egypt and their entrance into the promised land. The early Church spent times at the temple between the crucifixion-resurrection and Pentecost. Paul took a side trip between the call to apostleship and his missionary journeys. Just so the United States of America has needed a breather between Vietnam and Watergate and the 1980s. And Edmonds Christian

Church required, authentically, a heritage review between a period of controversy and its new and open future.

Understanding that true religion cannot be in a position to influence culture without, itself, being vulnerable to cultural forces, Beazley observed rightly:

To really survive in history and in any way affect the course of culture, a faith must be incarnated in a religion, and that religion must find a place in a cultural stream, or create one of its own. In the process, much purity of commitment to God will be lost, but without the process, the faith will not long survive.⁸

In the light of this, I would interpret the vulnerability of Edmonds Christian Church to the flow of the cultural stream in America as a mark of relevance, or at least of being sufficiently in touch with real life to have had the option of relevance.

In the final analysis, only what happens in the 1980s will really tell us whether we have passed from a point of crisis toward a moribund state, whether in the nation or the church, or have re-established a sense of identity and integrity. If we have done the latter, foundations have been built from which bold new ventures will be launched in the future. Which have we done in the congregation of Edmonds Christian Church with the review of heritage?

I hold a positive and optimistic view in regard to

⁸Ibid., pp. 316-17.

the above question. The effects of controversy, challenge and change appear to our experience in the local church as stumbling blocks. The task of education is to turn the blocks over and convert them into stepping-stones into the future. Reviewing heritage is a way of clearing off a place to stand in order to apply adequate leverage on the blocks to convert them. As a pastor who has been through this experience with my people, I will not wish to tread water in the 1980s. I perceive the congregation is of the same mind.

The past has not become our idol or a hiding place. It is seen as the vehicle that has delivered to us our heritage. The past is but prologue!

Facing a Devil's Advocate on the Issue of Method

We elected to use the lecture method as the means of reviewing Disciple heritage. Once again we find ourselves challenged. This time it is by a Christian education authority.

Paul B. Maves suggests that the lecture method is anachronistic. His remarks concerning the lecture method raise the question of whether there was an element of "cop-out" in the method itself. This is what he wrote:

The Christian Education of adults in the church is still faced with problems that have plagued it for many years. For one thing, it is extremely difficult to get adults in the church to break away from a

reliance upon a single method of education, that is from dependence upon the lecture by a so-called expert. This is the concept of education that stands in the forefront of their minds and almost automatically blocks out any other picture of education.⁹

Once again, as with the challenge to motivation for re-viewing heritage, the inference is made that a lack of courage and creativity is in evidence. Maves continues:

This tradition is supported by the fact that it protects persons from exposure to embarrassment, from real involvement in any process which would demand effort or energy or anxiety, by fear of asserting independence of powerful persons or by lack of confidence in their ability to assume any leadership. In many churches there is no awareness that any other method exists. Most persons do not know how to participate fruitfully in discussion or conversation.¹⁰

What can be said to this?

We might dismiss Mave's contentions out-of-hand as irrelevant where the congregation in question is concerned. Many members had earlier been through small group and encounter group experiences in which their abilities to be involved, interact, accept vulnerability, bear anxiety and exert effort had been demonstrated beyond question. Most often the pastor was involved as leader or participant.

Further, I have often expressed sentiments similar to those of Maves in church meetings where the education program and methods have been discussed. I am strong on

⁹Paul B. Maves, "The Christian Education of Adults," in Religious Education, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 140.

¹⁰Ibid.

small group experience, dialogue, participation by learners in the teaching-learning process in as many ways as possible and at as many levels as possible. Yet, in this educational project, which in some ways might have been considered a watershed event in the life of the congregation, I structured a lecture series to teach material I deemed vital to the health and future growth of the church. Why?

The answer is that there are two sides to this coin. There is a difference between being trapped in a method and intentionally choosing it because in a specific case it is the most feasible and, therefore, the most effective.

D. Campbell Wyckoff has spoken to the issue of method as follows:

Methods have an integrity of their own. In general we think of methods as relative to the objectives and outcomes that we and the pupils have in mind.¹¹

The two-sided coin has been the subject of much discussion in recent years in weighing the relative merits of transmissive and creative methods of Christian education. Wyckoff indicates that people who are interested in transmissive education are afraid that "the students led into creative education will not be introduced to the normative

¹¹D. Campbell Wyckoff, The Task of Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 34.

standards of the Christian faith."¹²

Something of this legitimate concern was involved in structuring the study of heritage in the form of a lecture series. We were interested in information concerning the Disciple heritage being transmitted in a clear and authoritative way (though not authoritarian). We wanted it clearly communicated that "a review of our heritage indicates that this is what it means to be a Disciple." There is clearly here an intentionality and congruity that needs no defense.

Further support comes from our mentor, Miller, who, in his book Education for Christian Living, casts the lecture method in this positive light:

The lecture is still the most popular of all educational methods. The tendency today is to deprecate it, but under the right conditions there is no more economical way to provide information.¹³

If this general statement supports the use of lecture for our purpose, his examples of features of good lecturing sound almost as though he had sat in on the lecture series. These Miller identifies as (1) it makes use of stories, life situations, and the enthusiasm of the lecturer, (2) it provides a basis for authority when the lecturer is an expert in his field, (3) it often takes account of the needs, interests, and feelings of the individual

¹²Ibid.

¹³Randolph Crump Miller, Education for Christian Living (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 204-5.

students, and (4) it can be supplemented with other methods of communication.

All of the above strengths were in evidence in the series of lectures and the participating lecturers whose efforts we analyzed in Chapter III. The lecturers did make use of personal stories, both concerning their own experiences and the experiences of historic personalities contributing to Disciple heritage. Their personal enthusiasm for the value of Disciple heritage was clear. Their expertise gained the respect and sustained interest of the hearers. And being themselves involved in sister congregations, whether as clergy or laity, involved in the same cultural milieu, and aware of the congregation's quest for identity and groundedness, the lecturers spoke with a real sensitivity to the needs, interests and feelings of the hearers. Further, the lectures were supplemented with handouts, question-answer periods and slides.

In my judgement, both the motivation behind the lecture series and the method itself bear up under close scrutiny. And we have already established in Chapter III that, while there was room for additional strength and clarification, the lecture series had many strengths in content as well as delivery. But the question still remains: Were they effective?

There are several forms of evidence that the lecture series attained a reasonable level of success as an

adult education project. We will look at three of these now.

Signs of Success

The response of some participants to a questionnaire, the fact that another church adopted the lecture series in its own program, and a notable change in the life of the congregation of Edmonds Christian Church appear to be signs of the success of the lecture series. We will share them in that order.

Response of some participants to the questionnaire circulated following the lecture series

In terms of numerical response to the lecture series, significant progress was made toward the objective of involving half of the adult constituency. Out of 120 possible adults a total of 60 attended at least one session and 46 attended the whole series.

We did not ask the participants to fill out evaluation questionnaires immediately at the end of the lecture series. Rather, we gave the series two months to "sink in" while many of those persons who had attended the lectures participated in various kinds of Bible study groups which were offered as the second part of this special adult education emphasis. Then, questionnaires were circulated among those who were present in worship services on two consecutive Sundays. No pressure was put on persons

to fill out or return the questionnaires. All were freely invited to do so.

With this open method, 23 questionnaires were returned.

The questionnaires offered an opportunity to respond to several questions in one of five ways: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NO = No Opinion, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree. The statements and responses to them appear below as follows:

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
There was great value in outside speakers.	11	10	1		
The Goal: "help all adults in the church grow in terms of broadening their horizons to a deeper understanding of the heritage of their Biblical faith" was significantly met.	7	11	4	1	
My faith in the Disciples of Christ movement has been strengthened.	7	11	5		
I understand better the impact Thomas and Alexander Campbell made that is so basic to our history.	7	10	6		
I am more supportive now of the Disciple denomination than before I began.	5	7	6		

While these responses are not statistically strong they are quite solidly positive in nature. We interpret them as a sign of success.

The opportunity to write a sentence each about "the three most exciting things I learned about," was not used very much. Some of the few responses, however, were revealing of the diversity of persons and their level of response and retention.

One man especially attentive to the "roots" element of Disciple heritage noted:

- (1) Church (Disciples) started with our nation.
- (2) We have our roots in freedom of choice.
- (3) The splits into other groups.

The wife of the above man had other recollections. She listed three responses as follows:

- (1) Leaders in those days drew larger crowds through evangelizing.
- (2) We tarred and feathered the Mormons.
- (3) Too long ago to remember.

A second man remembered back to the lecture series three things about Disciple heritage. He wrote:

- (1) Quality of leadership
- (2) People acceptance
- (3) Disciple evangelism.

This man's wife recorded no recollections of the lecture series but only of a study of Biblical Archaeology and a study of The Final Days of Jesus which she attended in the intervening weeks following the lecture series.

This does not indicate that the men were consistently more responsive to the lecture series than the women. In another family where the husband had a long-term association with the Disciples, while his wife had transferred

into the church from another denomination, uniting the family, the wife's response indicates careful interest. Each crossed off numbers 2 and 3 on the form and wrote a single comment in the space. His comment was: "The two separate roots of our denomination and their struggle." She reflected on the same ground a bit more pointedly, writing:

I most enjoyed the opportunity to experience some of the outstanding minds in this area in our denomination. I also found the source of conflicts and inconsistencies in our denomination go back to its roots.

A serious grasp of important elements in Disciple heritage had been gained.

We do not have, by any means, a complete picture of the impact made on the constituency by the lecture series, but we do have evidence that some appreciable change occurred in the consciousness of some members and that those responding to the questionnaire had very little negative response to make. The mood of the congregation following this adult education project would indicate that these attitudes were characteristic of the larger group.

A sincere form of flattery

Bellevue Christian Church is one of the leading Disciple congregations in the Puget Sound area. We interpret the fact that this congregation included this same series of lectures, delivered by the same lecturers, in

their church program after it appeared at Edmonds Christian Church, as a mark of its successful nature. The series was presented to the Bellevue congregation with these statements included in a letter appearing over the signature of Wesley Veatch, Minister. He wrote:

The series is an in-depth study of the Disciple Heritage with particular focus on the present as influences, persons and events of the past have bearing on our contemporary life.

And,

The series itself was first created under the helpful initiative of Roger Cone, Minister of Edmonds Christian Church. Through his catalytic action, each of us involved as participants did a great deal of preparation for the particular area of our presentation, with the assumption that we would reproduce the series again on other occasions.¹⁴

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Northwest is involved in a covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ and the Church of the Brethren. The ecumenical enterprise is known as United Ministries. I believe it is a mark of the importance and stature of the lecture series that the Bellevue Christian Church extended an invitation to United Ministries congregations in the area to attend, noting "special awareness of the relevance of the study as one dimension of our current conversations as Disciples with the United Church."¹⁵

¹⁴Veatch, in a pastoral letter to the congregation of Bellevue Christian Church, January 26, 1978.

¹⁵Ibid.

A notable change in the life of Edmonds
Christian Church

In introducing this paper, we noted that growth in the congregation had, at one point, ceased; that members of the church had stopped inviting others to visit the church for fear that they would be turned away by an awareness of tension and spirit of ambiguity in the life of the church. During that period, and for some time after that, any effort to bring people together with an announced intention to prepare for work in evangelism met with a weak and ineffectual response. Not more than six persons would respond. It was difficult for persons chairing the official governing board of the congregation to secure leadership for the Evangelism Committee.

A number of months after the presentation of the lecture series the experience of the church is that the Evangelism Committee has aggressive co-leadership (one man and one woman) and their initiatives are being met with enthusiastic response. An eight-week training course being led by the pastor, at the request of this committee, enrolled 34 participants. It is noteworthy that one-third of this group is comprised of Disciple families who have transferred to Edmonds Christian Church since the lecture series was presented. They represent five separate former geographical areas and a broad range in age. We can find no clearer commentary on the change that has taken place in

the life and spirit of the church.

While it may be difficult to document a direct connection between the lecture series and the change described above, it is clear that the congregation currently communicates its identity as a Disciple church to fellow Disciples and inspires an enthusiasm in them for sharing their heritage with others. What can be said is that, while the lecture series was only a part of a total effort, it was the principal adult education program offered at this point in the church's life designed to deal with the need for an understanding of Disciple heritage. It may be that the wisdom, within the congregation, to see the need for such a program and the will to make it possible, were more important to the increased stability of the church than the program itself. But my view is that the pursuit and support of this educational thrust simply demonstrated that the wisdom and the will were not illusory.

What I would Do the Same Way If I Were
To Do It Again

Since the lecture was well attended and well received and good things have happened in the life of the congregation since it was offered, the reader will not be surprised when I say that in the situation and setting in which Edmonds Christian found itself I would not make any drastic changes in the approach we took. Fine tuning would

be called for, not an overhaul of the lecture series as a vehicle for teaching Disciple heritage. It is not difficult to identify a number of things I would do again. I will briefly discuss some of them here.

(1) I would have the lecture series.

(2) I would involve the congregation in the development of the objective. Ownership of an objective in adult education does seem to assure a good measure of interest and support for the educational project embraced.

(3) I would seek to respond to questions being raised among the people of the congregation. Once felt needs are identified and owned, persons are responsive to authentic attempts to meet them. What is important is to separate out questions of a merely rhetorical nature.

(4) I would have several lecturers, so long as they would all be qualified. The psychological effect of introducing people to several leading personalities has a truly positive effect. Everyone in a large study group will find someone with whom identification comes easily--perhaps several. The trade-off against the possibility of having more depth in the identification and greater continuity in the lecture series with one leader is worth it, in my judgement.

(5) I would still schedule ninety-minute presentations with a brief break for refreshments at the end of the first hour or at mid-point, at the discretion of the

lecturer in question at any given session. It is a truism that the mind can only absorb what the seat can endure.

(6) I would still have one session each week in lieu of consecutive nights through one whole week, bi-weekly sessions or other format. The schedule is manageable for busy people and the pace of interest and learning does not wane. The one setting and format that might be more appealing would be a weekend retreat with follow-up.

(7) I would still allow and encourage a certain amount of overlapping, with lecturers free to move back and forth on the chronological scale, within reason. In this way the lecturers do have a way of reinforcing one another's presentations. A certain consensus seems to come through to the hearers which is authentic and valuable.

(8) I would still limit the series to eight sessions. With a larger group of hearers the sustaining of interest is more dependent on the value of the content and the effectiveness of the presentation than on the sense of community that builds in small groups.

(9) I would still not require any heavy reading of the learning group. Handout sheets of key material is effective. I would introduce the learners to important books and have them on display for examination, as most of the lecturers did.

(10) I would share tape recordings of the previous lectures with the lecturers to follow, as was done. This helps avoid an inordinant amount of redundancy and strengthens the team spirit among the lecturers, especially when it is not possible to have regular "faculty" meetings.

(11) I would still mix laity and clergy on the team of lecturers. This is especially appropriate for a lecture series on Disciple heritage, given Disciple emphasis on the role of the laity. It also helps broaden the range of possibilities for identification of hearers with the lecturers.

(12) I would still encourage the lecturers to offer a broad coverage of Disciple heritage, both in terms of reviewing the whole sweep of our history and in sharing both strengths and weaknesses of Disciple heritage.

(13) I would still hope for a generous expression of humor in the presentations. The subject matter is too important, serious, and heavy in places, to be dealt with apart from appropriate, life-giving humor.

What I Would Do Differently

(1) I would involve more people in a different process of arriving at questions to be addressed. Rather than placing so much weight on my own listening and interpreting skills, I would hold a brainstorming session

with as many persons as possible and amass the most questions concerning Disciple heritage they could produce. I would then ask them to draw up individual lists of the questions to put before the lecturers. I would then group the people in fours and have each small group negotiate a list they could agree upon together. Questions would then be given a numerical score value according to the frequency with which they appeared on the lists. This prioritizing process would be trusted to put us in touch with questions for which we seriously wanted answers.

(2) Rather than having a small group discussion session at midpoint in the series I would call for eight lectures. This would facilitate, along with other adjustments, the possible inclusion of material such as I have suggested in Chapter III and would provide for a celebration at the end of the series with time for focus on the future.

(3) I would encourage the use of more handouts.

(4) I would try to bring the lecturers together in a face-to-face experience more than one time during the period of preparation and, hopefully, at the end of the series.

(5) I would plan a closing celebration after the last lecture and probably at a separate time, bringing all the lecturers together with the group. There would be both formal and informal aspects of the gathering, giving time

for written evaluation, focusing in round-table fashion on the investment of heritage in the future, and joyous celebration and mingling.

A Summary of Some Learnings I Have Gained

(1) In Edmonds Christian Church as, I suspect, in many Disciple churches, there is a need for an ongoing program of adult Christian Education that provides an opportunity to understand and appropriate Disciple heritage. More than membership training classes using Tracing the Covenant and A Mini History, produced for Disciples by the Christian Board of Publication, is required. Excellent recent resources such as Teegarden's We Call Ourselves Disciples and Osborn's The Faith We Affirm should be examined and discussed. A reading table on Disciple heritage should be available at all times. We should be running ahead of the confusion that surrounds us by out-learning and out-growing it. It is part of the pastor's responsibility to aid and abet this process.

(2) A special Adult Education project such as the lecture series we have discussed can be an important and effective part of the process of searching out and stabilizing the identity of a congregation. A church does not have to be emerging from a state of crisis, however, to profit by such a program.

(3) There is no way to be healthy while denying

one's heritage. This is true for individuals, families, congregations and denominations. Just as there are positive and negative elements in our personal heritage, so with our church heritage. Honesty in owning our heritage is an important part of a sense of identity. There is a sense in which our heritage owns us inasmuch as it has had part in shaping us before we may have noticed. But, in a more important sense, we own our heritage and must decide where we go and what we do with it.

(4) It is important to respond to the questions being raised by church people concerning the heritage of their denomination, and to sense the questions they may not know how to ask.

(5) The lecture method is a valid and useable means of communicating ideas and sharing experiences. It has not outgrown its usefulness. Educational methods must be selected in the light of specific objectives and feasibility.

(6) The impact of persons is often as great or even greater than the information they share. A lecturer may be remembered long after his words cannot be recalled. And in a time when society, and the church, are short on heroes, putting people in touch with leaders who have the element of the heroic within them may help them realize that it is God's gift to themselves, as well.

(7) In the Disciple church and in our local

congregation we have all been involved in the process of acculturation. It is an inevitable part, perhaps, of living in the real world. The American nostalgia trip of the 1970s was reflected in the quest for heritage in our local congregation and the denomination. But that is not all bad. We may be in the process of re-discovering our capacity to grow with change, create change, lead change. The review of heritage is a way of being intentional. It need not bind us to the past but provide a clear perspective for living in the present and claiming the future.

(8) Understanding the "Disciple Mind" helps us understand why we as Disciples appear conservative to activist churches and have an aversion to emotionally laden movements. In the terms of Transactional Analysis, Disciples are inclined to ask the "adult" questions, testing the reasonable, universal and pragmatic nature of ideas and programs.

(9) A review of heritage can help persons come to a decision concerning whether they want to deepen their relationship to their church or opt for a different tradition.

(10) Leading a group of people in a review of Disciple heritage is not a matter of narrowing their vision but of putting them in touch with the S-I-Z-E of their religious tradition.

(11) The lack of a theological synthesis visible

and acceptable to all does not excuse us from the task of doing theology and teaching theology in the church. It simply demands that our conclusions be often tentative and our posture always open.

Conclusion

Christian education has a heavy responsibility to bear at this juncture in history. It must provide grist for the theological mills of lay persons without benefit of a theological synthesis.

In Chapter I we took note of Beazley's call among Disciples for scholarly reflection on their denominational heritage to re-formulate its abiding insights and relate that heritage to a contemporary school of thought that would provide "freshness and contemporaneity."¹⁶

We noted also that even late in the 1970s Baird, a responsible Disciple scholar, stood in the midst of the theological change and confusion and declared that the synthesis has not yet come.¹⁷

But Baird did point out hopeful signs both in the contemporary theological scene and in Disciple heritage.

Baird identified two groups of American theologians working on the cutting edge of theology at this time. These are (1) students of Charles Hartshorne in the field

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ William Baird, The Quest of the Christ of Faith (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), p. 156.

of Process Theology, as exemplified by Schubert Ogden and John Cobb, Jr., and (2) students of H. Richard Niebuhr such as Gordon Kaufman and Austin Van Harvey, working in theology from a historicist's perspective. But he does not see final results and declares, correctly, that they cannot be forced.¹⁸

Biblical theology will doubtless be of especially great importance while a theological synthesis is being sought. Baird is confident that we can tackle our basic task of being the Church, assuming the significance of the message of the Bible because of the primacy of its witness to historical revelation, and open to the outcome of the theological quest going on currently. For him the old Disciple hallmark, "No Creed But Christ" still has strength. He affirms that a Christ-centered faith will hold us up in any age.¹⁹ He sums it up as follows:

The revelation in Jesus Christ is not some new tactic lately introduced into God's strategy of redemption, but the wisdom of God, decreed before the ages. What we have seen and heard in Jesus is what God has ever been and even now is doing--taking part in human suffering and calling his people to deeds of love.²⁰

Roy Carlton Key, the thoughtful Disciple pastor who has recently authored the study book, Gracious Contagion, the official textbook for The Order of Andrew, the evangelism program modelled after the disciple of Jesus,

¹⁸Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 157-66.

²⁰Ibid., p. 166.

notes there that no official theology exists for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or for the whole Church. But Key does not see this as an insurmountable problem. He refuses to call sharing the same doctrinal formulation sharing the same faith.²¹ He, too, calls us to a Christ-centered faith marked by a common sense approach to the scriptures and commitment to the mission of the Church.²²

Baird and Key are examples of persons who have wrestled hard with their Disciple heritage, have emerged on their feet, appropriated the best out of their heritage and led us with clear heads into an open future. If what we see in them is any indication of the direction of Disciple response to their heritage in the midst of present confusion, namely, a Christ-centered faith, a responsible common sense approach to the Bible, and a continuing theological quest with openness toward God, the whole Church, the real world and the best that God inspires within us, then I envision a new day of vitality and growth for Disciples.

At Edmonds Christian Church I see the sun coming up even now.

²¹Roy Carlton Key, Gracious Contagion, A Textbook for The Order of Andrew (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1979), p. 17.

²²Ibid., pp. 21-22, 72-73.

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